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ENGLISH CLASSICS FOR INDIAN SCHOOLS

IMS563

THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR

ABRIDGED AND RETOLD FROM THE NOVEL OF
SIR WALTER SCOTT

BY

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விவேகானந்த புத்தகசாலை
இந்து மகாபிமான சங்கம்
காரைக்குடி.

THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR

I

In the south-eastern corner of Scotland, on a mountain-pass which leads from the Merse, or Border, of Berwickshire across the Lammermoor Hills, stood a once mighty castle, now in decay. It had belonged to a great race of warrior-lords, who bore the same name with the castle, which was Ravenswood. This family, old and honourable itself, had intermarried with others of equal rank, and had played a long and famous part in the history of Scotland. But from about the middle of the seventeenth century, its splendour waned; till the last owner of the castle, having supported the losing side in the civil war of 1689, found his title taken from him, and himself obliged to quit the ancient family seat, and to retire to a lonely tower which stood between St. Abb's Head and the village of Eyemouth, on the shore of the North Sea.

The new owner of the castle was Sir William Ashton, a clever scheming lawyer who, in the same troublous period of civil war which had ruined Lord Ravenswood, had reached the high rank of Lord Keeper of Scotland. By birth, he was far less than the Ravenswoods; but his foresight and cunning had enabled him to support the winning side, and to amass both wealth and power at the expense of less crafty rivals. For in those days in Scotland, government was in the hands of different parties by turns; high posts of trust were

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granted or withheld in accordance with party politics; and in particular, the laws were administered far rather to suit the ruling party than in obedience to justice; so that a scornful proverb about lawyers grew up—'Show me the man, and I will show you the law.'

It was no wonder, then, if people held Sir William Ashton, lawyer and politician as he was, to have succeeded to the Ravenswood estates by means not wholly honest. Old Lord Ravenswood at all events inclined to this view, and his resentment, that the seat of the Ravenswoods should pass to one of so much baser birth, was increased by his sense of injustice. For some time after his retirement to Wolf's Crag (as the tower where he now lived was called) he continued to bring successive legal actions against the new tenant of Ravenswood. But against so rich and powerful an opponent, these proved vain: and in despair, on hearing of the failure of the last of them, the proud old nobleman died. With his last breath he cursed his enemy; and his son Edgar Ravenswood received that curse from him, as a legacy of vengeance.

Lord Ravenswood had known little pomp at Wolf's Crag in his later years. But at his funeral, some of the old glory of his house was revived. Banner after banner followed him to the grave, bearing his coat of arms and those of the families connected with his. Many great gentry of the country were there, on horses pacing slowly to the long notes of trumpets, which were bannered with crape: and after these, a long train of servants and inferior mourners who were still passing from the castle gate when the coffin reached the grave.

The body was met here by a priest of the Scottish Episcopal church, dressed in his surplice and prepared

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to read the service of his church by the grave. Now, at this time the Episcopal service was forbidden by law; Lord Ravenswood had wished, however, to be so buried, and the Tory gentlemen who were his kinsmen had respected his wish. But the Presbyterian party, taking this as an insult to their own faith and power, had applied to Sir William Ashton (who was the nearest Privy Councillor) for a warrant to stop the service. So when the priest began to read, a legal officer with soldiers appeared, and ordered him to be silent. At once this insult was resented by young Edgar Ravenswood, then a youth of twenty, who clapped his hand on his sword, and bidding the officer to desist at his peril, commanded the clergyman to proceed. The officer held his ground at first; but as a hundred swords at once glittered in the air, he withdrew, protesting against the violence which had been offered to him, and muttering sullenly as one who should say, 'You will rue the day that clogs me with this answer.'

A strange scene followed as the clergyman, in the very chapel itself, and trembling for his own safety, read hastily and unwillingly the ritual of 'Dust to dust, and ashes to ashes' over ruined pride and decayed prosperity. The dead man's friends stood round, more angry than sorrowful, their drawn swords in violent contrast with their mourning clothes. In the face of the young man alone, anger seemed for the moment conquered by the agony with which he watched his father laid in the tomb. A relative who saw him, deadly pale, prepare to lower the coffin to the vault, offered his help. Young Ravenswood refused it mutely, and performed that last duty firmly without a tear. The stone was laid on the grave, the door of the vault was locked, and the youth took charge of its great key.

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On the steps he paused. 'Gentlemen and friends' he said, 'you have to-day done no common duty to your dead kinsman. The rites which in other countries are due to the meanest Christian would this day have been denied to him—noble though he was—had not they been secured to him by your courage. Others bury their dead in sorrow, in silence and in reverence; our rites are marred by officers and ruffians, and our grief chased from our cheeks by the glow of just indignation. But it is well that I know from what quiver this arrow has come. Only he who dug the grave could have the mean cruelty to disturb the burial. And may Heaven do as much to me, if I requite not to this man the ruin and disgrace which he has brought on us!'

Many of the crowd thought the young man's anger just; but the more cool and cautious regretted his words. The heir of Ravenswood, they thought, lacked power to brave the further enmity which his speech must provoke. Yet for the present, at any rate, their fears proved groundless. The mourners returned to the tower, to drink deep healths to the memory of the dead, to make the house of sorrow ring with sounds of debauch, and to waste still further the shrunk fortunes of the heir of the man whom they thus strangely honoured. There was wine and feasting, plentiful for all according to Scottish custom. But the Master of Ravenswood (as he was still called, retaining the title which his father had forfeited) drank nothing himself. With dark and sullen brow, he heard a thousand exclamations of resentment against the Lord Keeper, and of love for himself; knowing well that on the morrow, when the effect of the wine had passed, they would be

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forgotten. At last, with half-veiled contempt, he bade farewell to his guests and returned to the empty hall, which now seemed doubly lonely. But the place was full of phantoms—or so it seemed to him—the dishonour and downfall of his family, his own loss of hope, the triumph of his enemy.

Men say that on that night the Master of Ravenswood, in his bitter despair, aroused some fiend, to whose influence were due the tragic events which followed. But alas! what fiend can prompt more evil than our own passions, violent and unchecked, may suggest?

II

Next day, the officer told Sir William Ashton how he had fared. The statesman sat in a great library, which had once been the banquet-hall of the Castle of Ravenswood. His appearance was grave and even noble, as became one of high position in the state; and only one who knew him well could have discovered in him a kind of uncertainty: a weakness of purpose due to a timid mind; which, as he knew its influence upon himself, he was ever anxious to hide from others.

He listened, calmly as it seemed, to the other's exaggerated tale of what had happened, and of the contempt shown to his power, and to that of the church and state; and made no sign, even when he heard the threats and insults uttered against himself. But he made notes of all, and of the names of persons whom, at need, he could call as witnesses against Ravenswood. And when the officer had gone, he said to himself—Young Ravenswood is now mine—he has placed himself in my hand. I have not forgotten his father's

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enmity--the lawsuits he brought againts me, and his personal hatred. This boy of his, hot-headed and foolish, now has put himself in the wrong. For on the evidence of these notes I could accuse him to the Privy Council of riot against church and state, for which he might be fined, imprisoned or even (if a charge of treason were raised) put to death. I would not touch his life·····and yet, if power changed hands again, he would no doubt claim restitution and revenge. Yes, he is dangerous·····'

So he sat down, and began at once to draw up the charge against Ravenswood. Whilst doing so, he glanced up and saw carved on the wall the crest of the Ravenswood family. It was a black bull's head, with the legend 'I bide my time'; and Sir William recalled the tradition that, in the thirteenth century, a certain Ravenswood had been deprived of his estate by a powerful enemy. For awhile the latter had enjoyed his spoils. But one night before a banquet, Ravenswood made his way into the castle with some faithful retainers. The new master called impatiently for the feast to be served. But the Ravenswood, present in disguise, cried out in a stern voice 'I bide my time!' And at the same time a bull's head, the ancient symbol of death, was placed on the table. At once the conspirators rushed forward, and the usurper was put to death·····Perhaps the thought of the old story made Sir William afraid; for locking up his papers, he walked out, determined to think twice of the matter.

At the door he paused, for the sound of music reached him. It was his daughter Lucy, sitting in her own room, who sang—

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'Look not thou on beauty's charming,
sit thou still when kings are arming,
taste not when the wine-cup glistens,
speak not when the people listens,
stop thine ear against the singer,
from the red gold keep thy finger,
vacant heart, and hand, and eye,
easy live and quiet die.'

The words were well suited to the girl who sang them, for Lucy Ashton's features, exquisite and yet somewhat childish, expressed peace of mind and indifference to the glitter of worldly pleasure. Her hair of shadowy gold divided on her white brow like a pale gleam of sunshine on a hill of snow. Her expression was wonderfully gentle, timid and feminine, and seemed rather to shrink from the most casual glance of a stranger than to court his admiration.

Yet Lucy's passive nature was not due to an unfeeling mind. Left to herself, she was most sensitive to feelings of a romantic sort. Her secret delight was in old tales of chivalry, of ardent and faithful love, crossed, as these often are, with strange and supernatural adventures. In fancy, she would give prizes at some tournament, or encourage brave fighters with her eyes; or wander in the wilderness with her lion, like Una in Spenser's 'Faery Queene'; or like Shakespeare's Miranda, fancy herself living on some enchanted isle.

But in all dealings with the actual world, she was content to be ruled by those about her, not only because their minds were stronger and more energetic than her own, but because she had seldom any interest in resisting them; as one may often see in families

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some member, of softer temper, borne along by the will of others like a flower cast into a running stream. It happens usually that such a nature is beloved by the rest, to whom it seems to offer itself as a willing sacrifice: and so it was with Lucy. Her cautious, worldly father felt for her a love whose strength sometimes surprised him. Her soldier-brother Sholto, ambitious like his father but of a haughtier temper, felt also a more human love for her; for he preferred his sister even to pleasure and to his military advancement. And her young brother Henry, still a boy, was used to confide to her his trifling joys and fears, his success in sports and quarrels with his tutors.

Her mother alone felt no such peculiar love for her. For Lady Ashton was hard and proud, of far higher family than her husband's had ever been, and bearing herself towards Sir William very much as Lady Macbeth towards her husband in Shakespeare's play, namely, as the stronger partner of their joint ambition: ever ready to spur him on, whether by contempt or encouragement, when his own more timid spirit failed him. She looked on Lucy's mildness as mere lack of spirit (a sign that in their child Sir William's baser blood prevailed) and used to call her scornfully 'her Lammermoor Shepherdess.' And by contrast with Sholto, whom she preferred since he more closely resembled herself, she was apt to think Lucy feeble-minded.

'My Sholto,' she would say, 'will uphold the honour of his mother's house, and raise that of his father's. Poor Lucy is unfit for our world. Some country squire must marry her, rich enough to keep her in idleness. The Lord Keeper's dignity is new, and

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needs strong support, which Lucy can never supply to it!' Yet Lady Ashton was at fault,—not seeing that Lucy's quietness was due only to the fact that her passions were still untouched; nor that those passions, once aroused, might blossom more swiftly than her mother ever imagined.

III

As Lucy's song ceased, her father entered, with a request that she would attend him on a walk through the park. They went forth together, through rough forest-ground which rose behind the castle into a gorge of the hills; and as they paced slowly on, admiring the different views, a forester overtook them with a hound in leash and a crossbow on his arm.

'Going to shoot us a piece of venison, Norman?' his master asked.

'That I am, your honour! Will it please you to see the sport?'

But the colour went from Lucy's face at the thought of seeing a deer shot; and her father, although he knew that she would not have refused him her company, shook his head.

The man shrugged his shoulders. 'It is disheartening,' said he bluntly, 'when none of the gentry care to see the sport. I might resign my post, if it were not for captain Sholto; for Master Harry is kept so close to his Latin books that, for all his wish to be in the woods from morn till night, I see small hope of ever making a man of him. It was not so, as I have heard, in old Lord Ravenswood's time.....' And the old fellow went on to speak of former days, when all

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the gentry used to flock to the hunting; and in particular, of the prowess and bravery of young Edgar Ravenswood.

Sir William was not too pleased at all this; for he knew that his forester really despised him, for not having that taste for sport which was thought proper to a gentleman. He hid his mind, however; and as the forester was turning away, asked lightly whether the young Master of Ravenswood were indeed so brave a man, and so good a shot, as he had been told.

'Brave enough, I warrant you!' the forester said. And he then told his master how young Edgar once, when only sixteen years old, had saved his father's life from an angry stag by cutting the beast down with his cutlass.

'And is he as ready with the gun?' Sir William asked.

'He'll strike a coin out from between my finger and thumb at fourscore yards,' replied the forester. 'And what more could you wish?'

Soon afterwards, the man went his way, singing a rustic song which gradually grew faint in the distance—

The monk must arise when the matins ring,
The abbot may sleep to their chime;
But the yeoman must start when the bugles sing,
'Tis time, my hearts, 'tis time.
There's bucks and raes on Bilhope braes,
There's a herd on Shortwood Shaw;
But a lily-white doe in the garden goes,
She's fairly worth them a'.

'Has that fellow ever served the Ravenswoods?' the Lord Keeper asked. 'I suppose you can tell me,

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Lucy, since you know the history of every boor about the castle.'

'I believe he served here as a boy,' Lucy replied. 'But if you want to know anything of the former family, old Alice can tell.'

'What should I have to do with them?' exclaimed her father, displeased. 'And who is old Alice, pray?'

'She is blind, poor old soul. Yet when you talk with her, she seems to look into your very heart. She is worth visiting, if only for her acuteness and the dignity of her manners. Come, you must see Alice! We are not a quarter of a mile from her cottage.'

On the way, Lucy told her father more—how at one time the old woman had served the Ravenswoods, and now lived, a pensioner, on Sir William's estate. Before long they found her sitting before her humble cottage a tall commanding figure, simply but cleanly dressed, with an expression in her face which showed that, whatever misfortunes had overtaken her, her spirit was still unbroken. She welcomed the Ashtons with quiet dignity; but although they talked for some time, the Lord Keeper felt ill at ease with this old woman who seemed so wholly independent of his favour.

'Do not suppose,' he said at last, 'that I think any the less of you, for your loyalty to the former owners of this estate. You had reason, doubtless, to love them; but I hope that as we know each other better, we too shall be friends……unless indeed you are too much attached to them to accept any benefits from their successor?'

'Far from it, my lord. I am grateful for the benefits, which I decline. And I wish I could repay you

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better for them, than by what I must now say—' The Lord Keeper looked at her in surprise, but said nothing. 'My Lord' she went on solemnly, 'take care what you do. You are on the brink of a precipice. You have been harsh against the Ravenswoods. Believe me, they are a fierce house; and there is danger in dealing with desperate men.'

'What has been between us,' the Lord Keeper replied, 'has been the work of the law, not mine. You cannot mean that young Ravenswood would resort to personal violence?'

'God forbid! The young man is honourable and open—more, he is generous, noble, free. But he is still a Ravenswood, and may bide his time. Therefore, beware of him!'

The Lord Keeper was silent then; for the old woman, either on purpose or by accident, had touched his most secret fear. When he spoke, his voice was changed, as he replied that the Master of Ravenswood was a man of honour; and that even if he were not, the name of law was mighty enough to deter anyone from taking private vengeance for a supposed wrong. After which, without waiting for a reply, he hurriedly took his leave.

IV

For some time the Lord Keeper walked in silence. Then suddenly, he turned on Lucy and asked—

'Why do you look so pale?'

'I am afraid of the wild cattle there,' the girl replied. In those days, it was not thought right for a young girl to form opinions on her elders' affairs; so Lucy, loath to admit that she had heard Alice's words,

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made the wild cattle an excuse for her disquiet. These beasts, whose ancestors had once roamed savage and free in the Scottish forests, were sometimes still preserved in noblemen's parks, smaller and less ferocious now, yet dangerous if provoked. Lucy was not, in fact, afraid of them; but as her father was about to rebuke her supposed timidity, a bull left the herd and came towards them. Perhaps he was wilder than the rest, or perhaps Lucy's scarlet cloak had angered him; for he began to paw the ground, and bellow, and tear up the sand with his long horns. The Lord Keeper, seeing their danger, now drew Lucy away. But the bull exulted in their flight, and as they increased their pace, began to pursue at full speed. A braver man than the Lord keeper might have quailed. But as Lucy sank fainting to the ground, he turned and placed himself between her and the animal, now but a few yards away.

He had no weapon, and it seemed certain that one or both of them must be gored, when a shot rang from the woods. The bull, struck truly at the joint between skull and spine, fell instantly dead. And as Sir William stared in amazement and Lucy still lay senseless, a stranger appeared between the trees with a gun in his hand. The Lord Keeper called to him, supposing him to be one of the foresters, and bade him attend Miss Ashton while he himself went for help.

The rescuer lifted Lucy in his arms, and bore her through the woods to lay her beside a fountain, about which a strange legend was told. In old times a Ravenswood had loved a beautiful girl who used to meet him here, one day each week, on condition that they should part at the sound of the vesper-bell. Lord Ravenswood confessed his love to a priest, who

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assured him that this condition could only mean that the girl was a fiend from hell. The lover at first refused to share this belief; but in the end consented that the bell, one night, should be rung at a later hour; in which case, the monk warned him that the lady would revert to the form of a devil. No such change, indeed, took place: but as the lengthening shadows showed the girl that she had stayed too late, she tore herself from his arms and plunged into the fountain with a shriek of despair. Bubbles stained with blood arose, from which the wretched lover knew that his curiosity had caused her death. Not long after, he himself fell at the Battle of Flodden. But in remorse, ere this, he had built up the shelter which for many a year secured the well from pollution. The decay of the house of Ravenswood was thought to date from this time; and no Ravenswood would ever drink at the well, or willingly approach its brink.

Here Lucy's senses first returned, and at once she remembered her father. 'He is safe,' the stranger said; and when she tried to rise, repeated, 'He is perfectly safe, and will soon be here. You are exhausted. Do not try to rise till you have help more suitable than mine.'

Lucy now had time to observe her rescuer. He wore a shooting dress and cloak; his cap partly hid his features, which were dark, regular and full of dignity, although some secret care or sorrow seemed to have taken from them some of the brightness of youth. He had shown no eagerness to hold Lucy any longer than her safety required, and now seemed reluctant to approach her again; and when she tried to thank him, replied abruptly, 'I leave you, madam,

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to the care of those to whom you have been, perhaps, a guardian angel to-day.'

Lucy pressed her thanks, but the stranger listened coldly and ignored her request to be told his name. Just now the Lord Keeper himself came up, with one or two followers, full of joy to find his daughter safe, and no less eager than she to thank their deliverer.

'This gentleman,' he said, 'will, I trust, forgive the trouble we have given him, when I assure him of the thanks of the Lord Keeper for the greatest service which one man may do to another—for the life of my child, and my own. He will permit us to request—'

'Request nothing of *me*, my lord,' interrupted the stranger sternly. 'I am the Master of Ravenswood.'

There was a dead pause of surprise, mixed with less pleasant feelings. The Master wrapped himself in his cloak, made a haughty bow to Lucy, and muttered a few words of cold politeness; then, turning from them, vanished into the woods.

When the Lord Keeper recovered from his surprise, he sent off a forester in haste to beg the Master to speak to him, if but for a single moment. Soon the fellow returned. 'He just said he would not come back' he told his master, cautiously.

'He said more, sir! And I wish to know what it was.'

'Why then, sir,' the man replied, very unwillingly, 'he said—Tell Sir William Ashton that when next we see each other, he will be less pleased to meet than to part!'

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With this, the Lord Keeper had to be content. But that night he wrote out afresh his report on the events, which had attended the old Master's funeral. In this he softened, to the best of his power, the rash conduct of Ravenswood, pointing out how sorely the young man had been provoked, and urging that no official action should be taken against him. In short, he posed as friend and mediator on the young man's behalf, to the great surprise of all his friends in Edinburgh, who knew well the enmity between these two, and suspected that some good reason, unknown to them, had prompted Sir William's letter. And there the matter rested.

Lucy's mind, meanwhile, was filled with thoughts of her rescuer. In dreams, both asleep and waking, she recalled the charging bull, and the nobility and courage of the young man who had saved her. She knew little of him, nor of the quarrel between her father and his. But she had heard how poor and proud he was, in spite of his birth: and she wished often that her father had approached him more mildly, or that she might have had more opportunity to thank him herself. She questioned Alice, too: but the old lady, while speaking freely of the Ravenswood family, would say little to Lucy of the present Master, hinting only, that he was stern and far more prone to resent than to forgive, and reminding Lucy sadly of her advice to Sir William, to 'beware of Ravenswood.'

Yet he had saved Sir William's life as well as her own, at a time when he need only have stood aside to let his enemy die. Lucy wondered whether old Alice, after all, had not some secret prejudice against Ravenswood; and was inclined in gratitude to think

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more favourably and romantically of the young man, than she would have cared to own. Her mother was now away from home; and Lucy, left to herself, began to weave in her own mind a fairy web of hopes and fancies, fair and fragile as gossamer in the morning sun. But these she kept secret.

V

On the evening of the Lord Keeper's escape, two men sat privately in a small inn halfway between the Castle of Ravenswood and the tower of Wolf's Crag. Drink was before them, but they looked glum enough, and sat waiting silently, each wrapped in his thoughts. The elder, forty years of age, was tall and lean, with a hooked nose and shrewd but sinister features. The other, fifteen years younger, was short, stout and ruddy, with bold careless eyes.

'The Master is late, and must have failed,' said the young man presently. 'I should have gone with him.'

'He is enough to right his own wrong,' replied the other.

'We have risked our lives in coming even so far.'

'You are a coward, Craigengelt, and many people have thought so.'

Craigengelt drew his sword an inch or two, but returned it to the scabbard. 'You are too hasty, Bucklaw,' he frowned. 'Yet I have higher stakes to play for, than the life of a hare-brained fool like you.'

He spoke truly. They were Jacobites, these two, intriguing in Scotland on behalf of the dethroned house of Stuart; and since the exiled king was too poor to support his envoys sufficiently, their career was as

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needy as it was dangerous. Just now, they hoped to win the sympathy of the Master of Ravenswood, and to gain credit for themselves by taking him back with them to join the king's party abroad. They knew his quarrel with the Lord Keeper, and that he had gone to expostulate with the latter to-day. It seemed quite possible that the two might come to blows, and that the Master would kill his enemy; in which case they had horses ready to help him escape to the coast, where a French ship awaited them. Young Bucklaw's loyalty was firm enough in this plot; but he knew well that his companion, Craigengelt, put his own safety first; and that if their plans went wrong, Craigengelt would readily betray the Master to save his own skin.

As they sat waiting, Ravenswood himself entered, muffled in his cloak, with a look both stern and dejected.

'What has happened? What have you done?' the two men cried.

'Nothing.'

'You have seen him?'

'I have.'

'And left, without settling your old scores?' Bucklaw exclaimed. 'I should not have expected that of you!'

'No matter what you expected,' replied Ravenswood. 'It is not to you that I shall give reasons for my conduct.'

'Patience, Bucklaw!' Craigengelt put in cautiously. 'The Master has been interrupted, perhaps. Yet he will excuse the anxious curiosity of his friends—'

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'Friends, Captain Craigengelt?' retorted Ravenswood proudly. 'I do not know by what right you use that term. Our friendship amounts only to this, that we agreed to leave Scotland together when I had seen the Lord Keeper.'

'Very true,' Bucklaw agreed. 'And as we thought you had a mind to risk your neck, Craigengelt and I were content to wait for you, despite the risk to ourselves.'

'Gentlemen,' the Master said, 'I am sorry if I have caused you trouble. But I must claim to judge what is best for my own affairs, without giving reasons to anyone. I have changed my mind, and do not mean to leave the country yet.'

'Not leave the country!' Craigengelt exclaimed. 'After all the risk and expense to which I have gone!'

'Sir,' replied the Master, 'when I planned to leave Scotland, I accepted your offer to find me the means; but I did not pledge myself to go, if I had reason to change my mind. For your trouble, I am sorry, and thank you. For your expense, you must take this purse and pay yourself as you think fit.'

But Bucklaw intervened. 'Your fingers, Captain, itch for that purse,' said he. 'But if they take it, I vow I will chop them off with my sword. Since the Master has changed his mind, we need stay no longer. But I beg leave to tell him—'

'Tell him what you will,' said Craigengelt. 'But let me remind him, first, to what trouble he will expose himself by leaving us and remaining here; and secondly, what difficulty he will find in joining the king's party abroad, without the help of our introduction.'

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'Besides forfeiting the friendship,' said Bucklaw, 'of at least one man of spirit and honour.'

'Gentlemen,' said Ravenswood, 'let me tell you again, that you have thought our connection more important than I ever meant it to be. When I go abroad, I shall need neither the introduction of a scheming adventurer, nor the friendship of a hot-headed bully.' With these words, and without waiting for an answer, he went out and was heard to ride away.

VI

The Master had not gone far towards home when he heard a galloping behind him, and a voice that cried, 'Halt, sir! I am no Craigengelt, but Hayston of Bucklaw. And no man insults me but must answer for it.'

Ravenswood stopped, at a place where the road crossed a lonely moor, and said coldly, 'I desire no quarrel with you, Mr. Hayston of Bucklaw.'

'Do you not?' cried Bucklaw. 'Yet you called us intriguing adventurers.'

'I called your companion so, and you know that so he is.'

'Right or wrong, no man shall insult my companion, then.'

'Then you should choose your company better, or you will not lack quarrels,' returned the Master as coldly as before. 'Go home, sir; sleep; and have more reason to-morrow.'

But Bucklaw would not hear. 'You called me bully,' he pursued. 'You must retract, or make good your words.'

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'I have done what I could to avoid a quarrel,' Ravenswood said. 'But, since you insist—' And with that he dismounted and drew his sword.

Bucklaw well used to such affairs, was a good swordsman. But he had lost his temper; whilst the Master, equally skilled, remained calm and seemed content to defend himself, even declining to use one or two advantages which the other's rashness offered. At last Bucklaw, lunging wildly, slipped and fell. But the Master stood aside. 'Take your life,' said he. 'And mend it, if you can.'

Bucklaw rose and held out his hand. 'I thank you, Master! And I bear no ill-will, either for my bad luck or for your better skill.'

'You are a generous fellow, Bucklaw,' the Master said. 'And I ask your pardon.' So the two became friends. But at this moment they were overtaken by a boy, riding at full speed, and calling on them to save themselves. Craigengelt, he cried, had been arrested at the inn by some soldiers, who were seeking Bucklaw too.

'Then you must ride with me to Wolf's Crag,' said the Master promptly, 'for I can hide you there.' And without further words the two rode forward hastily, by wild lonely roads, nor slackened speed till night was falling and they were safe from immediate pursuit.

'I would ask you a question,' said Bucklaw then; and went on, 'What made you, a gentleman, conspire with such a rogue as Craigengelt, and such a scapegrace as myself?'

'I joined him in despair,' the Master replied, 'and left him, because I had changed my mind for the

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present. But tell me in turn, why do you keep company with him, who is so much beneath you?'

'Plainly,' said Bucklaw, 'because I am a fool, and have gambled my land away. Craigengelt saw my plight, persuaded me that he had credit abroad, and promised me a post at Paris. I have been ass enough to use his help, though I dare say, by now, he has betrayed me to the government. And that is what my folly has gained.'

'Yes, Bucklaw,' the Master said, 'you have indeed nourished a snake in your breast.'

'And you?' replied Bucklaw. 'What of the snake which you have nourished—I mean your thought of revenge?'

'On my soul,' said Ravenswood, 'I had no thought of killing the Lord Keeper. I wished only to face him with the wrong he has done me, before leaving the country.'

'But your very look and manner,' Bucklaw pointed out, 'would have frightened the old man to death, and then……No, no, we are rash fellows, both of us! For my part, I intend to put my vices from me, as soon at least, as my great-aunt, old Lady Girnington, dies.'

'Hell is paved with good intentions, they say.'

'Well,' replied Bucklaw, 'I will begin tonight, and have determined not to drink above one quart of your wine.'

'You will find little to tempt you at Wolf's Crag,' the Master said. By this time they were nearing the castle, perched like an eagle's nest upon the cliffs above the roar of the sea. The moon came out, and

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showed them the bare and lonely tower. On three sides the cliffs were sheer; on the fourth the castle had been fenced by a ditch and drawbride, but the latter was broken down and the former partly filled; so that a single horseman might ride through the gate into a courtyard of ruined stables and outhouses, with the tower itself beyond. There was no sign of life, save one small narrow window through which a faint light gleamed. A wilder, lonelier home could hardly be imagined.

'There is but one male servant left to me,' said Ravenswood; and added, when they had knocked repeatedly and had no answer, 'And I fear he must be away, or fallen into a fit.'

But now the light moved down the tower, from window to window, as though some one were coming down the winding stair. Till at last the huge door was slowly opened, and a very old man stood before them. 'Is it you, my dear master?' he exclaimed. 'I grieve that you should wait at your own door, but indeed I was not expecting you for some months, when you should have been received with proper honour.' And with that, he began to call loudly on two or three grooms by name, to take the gentlemen's horses, and upon others to prepare food and fire within.

No grooms appeared. And in truth, there were none in the place; nor any living soul, save Caleb Balderstone and an old woman called Maisie who helped him to look after Wolf's Crag. But the old man remained so loyal to Ravenswood, that he could bear no stranger to discover the ruin and poverty of the house. It was his custom, therefore, to pretend

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that there were plenty of servants within call, and no lack of hospitality: and although Bucklaw was in no way deceived by this, he and the Master had to wait while Caleb gathered what little plain food he had, and prepared an old lean hen (the very last of their stock), and tilted all the empty wine-casks to collect a flagon of dregs; which poor fare he presently brought up, with many ingenious excuses, and set before them. Young Bucklaw, disappointed as he was, had the good manners to accept the old man's pretence, and to seem to enjoy the feast; though for all his love of wine, he was obliged to leave Caleb's flagon unfinished and to drink water instead.

Meanwhile old Caleb made him a rough bed in a secret room of the tower, where he might safely hide even if the castle were searched. 'For the secret room has not been used,' the old servant explained, 'since the Gowrie Conspiracy; and I dared never let a woman know of it, or it would not have been secret for long!'

VII

The dawn of another day had the effect of soothing, to some extent, the cares and passions which had racked the Master of Ravenswood. He rose, resolved to ponder his position and to take wise thought for his future. But his first duty was to visit Bucklaw in the secret room, and ask how he had slept. 'The place is poor enough,' he said. 'But if you will rise and leave it, Caleb will try and find you better fare than last night's.'

'Let it be no better,' Bucklaw smiled, 'if I am to keep my promise of reforming my ways. The thought

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of Caleb's wine does more to keep me sober, than twenty sermons··· ··You see, I am smothering my snake! But what of your own?'

'I begin to think better of my plan of revenge,' the Master replied. 'And I have had a vision of an angel, who descended to help me.'

'Alas,' said Bucklaw, 'I can expect no vision, unless my great-aunt should die. And then it would be her heritage, rather than her ghost, which would support me.'

The Master next sought Caleb, offering him the purse with all the money he had left in the world. But Caleb would not take it, preferring to stretch the family's credit to the utmost among neighbouring farms, so as to feed his visitors for a few days at least. He could set little before them, certainly; but the variety and length of his excuses amused them greatly, and added a sort of interest to their lean mode of life. Their time passed heavily. Bucklaw, being forced to stay hidden within the castle, felt the loss of those field-sports which he was used to enjoy, and became a joyless companion. While as for Ravenswood, his own anxious thoughts brought him as much unhappiness, as tedium brought to his friend. The memory of Lucy Ashton impressed him, more than her presence had done. And as his passion for revenge abated, he began to think that his behaviour to her had been unworthy and harsh. He had repelled her thanks: and even though her father had wronged him, he repented now of having shewn ill-will towards herself. Till at last he began to imagine in her more grace and beauty than, perhaps, she possessed.

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Thus, his desire to avenge his father's death was now strangely softened by admiration of his enemy's daughter. He still wished to leave the country, yet delayed, till as time went on young Bucklaw began to ask what plan he had made.

'I have been waiting for a letter from the Marquis of A,' the Master answered. And he went on to explain that this old lord, who was a kinsman of his, had great power and influence among the Privy Council at Edinburgh, enough even to rival that of the ruling party, to which the Lord Keeper belonged. Men said that a change of government might soon take place; in which event the Marquis, doubtless, would take care that Ravenswood should be given some post in the state, and his fortunes restored. 'Fate watches for us, Bucklaw,' he concluded; and with that he held out a letter from the Marquis for his friend to read.

This letter was long, and so cautiously written that Bucklaw took some time to grasp its meaning; for although the messenger was trusty, a letter sent so far might have fallen into enemy's hands, and the old Marquis was too wary a statesman to write all his mind. He assured Ravenswood, however, of his own good-will towards him, with the hope that soon he would be able to do more for him, than he had done in the past: there were some matters, he went on, which he would like to discuss with Ravenswood, but for the present he could not invite his kinsman to pay him a visit; he advised him not to go abroad, lest enemies should whisper that he had left Scotland for some ill reason; and urged him rather to stay at Wolf's Crag and watch the course of events, till the harvest-season was over. Lastly, he hinted once again

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that better times were at hand, and signed himself, 'Your loving cousin, A—.'

'What think you of the letter, Bucklaw?' said the Master, when his friend had at last read it.

'Why, that the Marquis's meaning is as great a riddle as his handwriting! He bids you to remain idle in this wretched country, but does not offer you the shelter of his house. I think he has some plot, in which he will use your help if it is needed, and, if not will turn you adrift.'

'Some plot! Some treason, do you mean?'

'What else? He has long been thought to favour the Jacobites.'

'He will not easily win *me* to their cause,' said Ravenswood, 'while I recall the times of the first and second Charles, and of the last James……But indeed, I hope to see the day when justice shall be open to both parties, and the names of Whig and Tory no longer have any serious meaning.

'That is fine talk,' Bucklaw replied. 'But my heart is with the old song—

> To see good corn upon the rigs,
> and a gallows built to hang the Whigs,
> and the right restored where the right should be,
> oh, that is the thing that would wanton * me.

'You may sing as loudly as you will,' answered the Master. 'But I believe the Marquis is too wise, at least too wary, to join you in such a chorus. I suspect his letter hints at changes in the Scottish Privy Council, rather than in the British kingdom.'

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* Please.

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Bucklaw laughed impatiently. But at that moment Caleb rang the dinner-bell; and the two young men sat down to an even leaner meal, than any which he had so far provided.

VIII

Light meals are followed by light sleep; and in the morning Bucklaw ran into his host's room with a loud halloo.

'Up, up!' he cried. 'The hunters are out, the first sport I have seen this month. I have saddled the horses myself; for old Caleb kept pretending to call for grooms, and would never have let us start without two hours of apology!'

Caleb himself appeared, and at once began to waste their time in offering Ravenswood a choice of numerous clothes for the hunt. But the Master knew he had but one suit, beside that which he wore, and bade his man bring it.

'It is sad-coloured,' the old fellow complained. 'But then, you are in mourning. At least it is well brushed; and as there are ladies down there—'

'What ladies, Caleb?'

'I do not know, your lordship. I could but see them flashing past, with their bridles ringing and their feathers waving, like the Court of the Fairies.' And then he drew his master aside. 'One word, sir! Pray bring no one home to dinner. We are out of food, but if you can contrive to dine with one of the hunters today, I will do what I can for tomorrow.' The Master nodded; and mounting his horse, galloped after Bucklaw down the steep path from the tower.

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Once away, he forgot his gloomy thoughts and felt the natural love of a young man for the chase. But alas, his horse had suffered like himself from the family's poverty, and began to grow tired. Bucklaw checked his speed; and at this moment they were joined by a well-mounted stranger, who begged the Master to honour him by taking his own steed. He declined; but Bucklaw, less scrupulous, accepted the stranger's horse and threw the reins of his own to the Master.

'My horse,' the man said, 'belongs to one who wishes you well. you will learn his name from himself. If you please to take your friend's mount, and leave me yours, I will meet you after the hunt.'

Ravenswood now hurried forward towards the sound of the horn. But Bucklaw kept ahead, and arrived first at the spot where the stag had turned at bay. The rest came up one by one, and closed round, waiting for a chance to cut down the stag, while the hounds stood aloof and bayed loudly. And then Bucklaw, leaping from his horse, ran in and brought the stag to the ground with a stroke of his hunting-sword. The hounds now soon killed him; and the huntsman, after calling them off, knelt down and offered his knife to a fair lady whose terror, or perhaps her pity, had kept her at a distance. She wore a black silk mask, as the fashion was for ladies in mixed company; but her rich dress, and the compliment paid to her by the huntsman, showed her to be the chief person in the field. She shrank back, however, refusing the man's offer that she should make the first cut in the stag. And while the huntsman gave the knife to Bucklaw instead, she withdrew from the company.

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Ravenswood meanwhile, seeing that the chase was over, had paused on a hill hard by; for he reflected bitterly, that poverty had robbed him of the sport due to his rank, and that these strangers hunted now upon the land which his fathers had owned. And now a gentleman rode towards him, an old man as it seemed; but his cloak was buttoned high upon his face and his hat pulled over his eyes. 'I think,' he said, 'that one of my people had the sense to lend his horse to your friend?'

'I am much obliged,' replied the Master. 'My friend is Mr. Hayston of Bucklaw, who will add his thanks to my own.' He turned then, and made towards Wolf's Crag, which was close by. But the stranger rode beside him; so that the Master could not, without rudeness, escape from his company. Before long he asked—

'That ancient castle, then, is wolf's Crag, famous in Scottish history?' The Master merely nodded, and the other went on—'One of the first possessions, I have heard, of the Ravenswood family?'

'Their first, and probably their last.'

'I—I hope not, sir!' the stranger hesitated. 'Scotland knows what she owes to this ancient family. And even now, perhaps—'

'I will save you the trouble of saying more,' put in the Master haughtily. 'I am the heir of that unhappy house, the Master of Ravenswood. And you, sir, as a gentleman, must know that the next worst thing to being unhappy, is to be pitied against one's will.'

With that the elder man began to express his regrets; but before Ravenswood could part from him,

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the masked young lady joined them. 'Daughter,' the stranger said, 'this is the Master of Ravenswood.'

The Master would have replied, but something familiar in the lady's looks made him suddenly dumb. And now the clouds, which had been gathering above Wolf's Crag, spread lower and darker; thunder was heard, and the lightning flashed across the sea. The lady's horse took fright, and Ravenswood felt bound to help her to manage him; while the old gentleman, observing the coming storm, looked wistfully towards the tower. The lady was trembling much, and it became impossible for Ravenswood to avoid offering them shelter. But as he led the way into the court-yard and called Caleb, his tone was stern, and strangely lacked the courtesy of one who receives honoured guests.

Old Caleb's face grew pale, when he beheld such guests and remembered that dinner-time was at hand. Yet he began to ask his master's pardon, and to pretend that all the other servants had gone out to the hunt. But Ravenswood silenced him.

'This old man,' he said, 'and a still older woman, are all my retinue; and our means of refreshing you are even scantier than you might suppose. But such as they are, you may command them.'

Caleb, amazed, found not a word to reply. 'He has gone mad—quite mad!' he muttered. And then, to make things worse, the sound of Bucklaw's voice came to his ears, heard even above the clatter of hoofs and braying of horns, which warned him that the greater part of the hunt was climbing the narrow path to the tower. 'But they shan't beat me!' Caleb vowed to

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himself. 'The rascal! to bring such a crew here, that will expect to find brandy flowing like water, and he knowing the plight in which we are at present! Yet I trust, that if I could get rid of those gaping servants who have slipped into the courtyard behind their masters, I could make all well yet!'

By what means old Caleb carried out his resolve, the reader shall learn in the next chapter.

IX

Hayston of Bucklaw was one of those, who think more of a jest than of a friend. So when the huntsman saw his master make for Wolf's Crag, and proposed to bear the stag there after him, Bucklaw agreed at once. He laughed, to think how upset Caleb would be at the arrival of such a party, and never stopped to consider his friend the Master. But he found Caleb ready for him.

The old man's first task was to get rid of those already within the gate. He proposed, therefore, that both he and they should go out to meet the huntsmen. They agreed; but Caleb, as they passed through the huge door, slipped back and swiftly shut it behind them. He then mounted to a little window above, and told them the Master of Ravenswood and his guests were about to dine; that the castle doors were never opened at meal times; but that the village inn would furnish them with drink if they cared to go to it. He even hinted that such drink would be paid for by the Master, but took care not to promise this.

By this time the other huntsmen had arrived, some amused, some angry, but all very astonished. Bucklaw himself came forward wrathfully, and demanded

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to see the Master, but Caleb was firm. Not if the king himself were at the gate, he said, should the rules of the castle be broken. So they had to submit.

Bucklaw led them down the hill again to the inn. And here he met with a friend—none other than Captain Craigengelt, who greeted him warmly. 'All is settled,' boasted Craigengelt. 'They dare not make a prisoner of *me*! I came to tell you that you need not hide any longer. I am a friend worth having, you see.'

'Then lend me two gold pieces, to wash the dust from these honest fellows' throats, and then—'

'Two pieces? Twenty!' cried Craigengelt, pouring the money into his friend's hand. Bucklaw knew well enough that such generosity was not due to mere friendship, and wondered what secret reason Craigengelt had for obliging him; but he took the money none the less. 'Come along, lads! I will pay the cost,' he cried.

'Long life to Bucklaw!' shouted the hunters. And rushing after him into the inn, they began a feast which lasted far into the night.

Meanwhile a very different scene was passing in Wolf's Crag. The Master of Ravenswood had led his guests to the great hall, whose narrow windows, set in the thick stone walls, seemed rather to shut out than let in the daylight, and whose darkness was now increased by the thunder-storm. 'This roof,' said he, 'can still protect a guest, though it cannot welcome him. But it is time that I should know who they are, that have thus honoured my ruined house.'

The young lady remained silent; and the father, like an actor failing in his part, seemed quite at a loss to find words for what he wished to say. His cloak and

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hat still hid his face, nor did he hasten to remove them; till Ravenswood, more and more impatient of the delay, continued, 'I perceive that Sir William Ashton is unwilling to announce himself in the castle of Wolf's Crag.'

'I had hoped I need not do so,' the Lord Keeper replied. 'And I thank you, Master of Ravenswood, for speaking first in so awkward a situation.'

'Then I am not to suppose your visit altogether an accident?' asked the Master gravely.

'It is an honour,' said the Lord Keeper, 'which I have long desired; but which I might never have gained, without the accident of this storm. My daughter and I both welcome this chance to thank the brave man, to whom we owe our lives. Lucy, my love, lay aside your mask: and let us speak our gratitude openly.'

'If the Master will accept it,' was all Lucy said; but in a tone so sweet and innocent, that her words cut Ravenswood to the heart for his harshness. He answered, partly in surprise and partly in confusion, with a few words of welcome, ending in the light kiss which in those days was usual upon such an occasion. And a deep blush was still on Lucy's cheek, when suddenly the room was lit by a vivid flash of lightning. For an instant, everything was clearly seen—the slight, timid form of Lucy Ashton, the tall manly figure of Ravenswood, the old arms and shields which hung on the walls,—in that strong red glare of light. It vanished, and instantly a burst of thunder followed, for the storm was close to the castle and the peal was so sudden and dreadful, that the old

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tower rocked to its foundation, and they all thought that it was falling on them. The soot showered down from the huge chimneys, lime and dust flew in clouds from the wall; and as though the lightning had actually struck the castle, several heavy stones were hurled from the battlements into the sea below. It almost seemed as if the ghost of the old founder of the castle were riding on the storm, and showing his anger at the peace made by Ravenswood with the enemy of his house.

All were dismayed, and both the Lord Keeper and Ravenswood had much ado to keep Lucy from fainting. Thus for the second time it was the Master's task to support and aid the beautiful and helpless girl, about whom he had already begun to think and dream so often. If the Genius of the House really condemned a union between the Master and his fair guest, his means of showing his displeasure were ill-chosen. For as the two men joined in helping the fainting girl, it was impossible for Ravenswood to bear in mind the enmity between the Lord Keeper and himself. And by the time that Lucy, holding out a hand to each, was able to thank them, Ravenswood's old hatred of Sir William was no longer the uppermost feeling in his heart.

The weather, Lucy's faintness, and the absence of her servants, all made it impossible for her to leave Wolf's Crag that night; nor could the Master well refuse to offer the Ashtons lodging; but his face grew hard again as he confessed, how little able he was to entertain them.

'Do not mention that,' said the Lord Keeper eagerly. 'We understand that you were about to go abroad, and that your house is probably unfurnished

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at present. But if we find that we are troubling you, we shall feel bound to seek rooms in the village.'

As the Master of Ravenswood began to reply, the door opened and Caleb Balderstone rushed in.

X

'Woe, woe!' the old servant cried 'That such misfortune should befall the house of Ravenswood, and that I should live to see it!'

'Has any part of the castle fallen?' his master asked.

'Nay? But the soot has fallen, and the thunderbolt came down the kitchen-chimney! Now all is scattered, and there is nothing left in the whole house to serve for dinner—nor for supper either, I fear!'

'I believe you, Caleb,' said Ravenswood drily; for he guessed at once, that Caleb's tale of a thunderbolt in the kitchen was an invention, a clever excuse, to explain the absence of a dinner which, in fact, had never existed. Caleb himself, indeed, had seized his chance to add to the noise of the thunderbolt by throwing down a shelf-full of crockery, and by making such havoc in the kitchen that the old woman, who was his only fellow-servant, thought he had gone mad. But he saw now that Ravenswood was not deceived by his tale, and so whispered hurriedly, 'Hold your tongue, for Heaven's sake, sir. If I am willing to tell lies for the honour of the family, it is no business of yours.....' And at once, turning towards Sir William Ashton, he began to count on his fingers all the numerous dishes which (he said) were to have appeared at their feast, had not the thunderbolt destroyed them.

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By this time, Miss Ashton was well enough to watch what was going on; and observing Ravenswood's impatience, contrasted with Caleb's zeal in giving all details of the imaginary dinner, she found the scene so ridiculous that she could not help bursting into laughter; her father did the same, and so at last did Ravenswood, though the jest was against himself. Caleb meanwhile stood firm, with an angry and scornful dignity which made them laugh the more. 'You gentlemen have breakfasted so well,' he exclaimed at last, 'that you can laugh at the loss of the best dinner that ever a cook put her fingers to! Were you as empty as Caleb Balderstone, your mirth would be less. Yet I have little doubt, that if I go down into the village now I can bring back enough to give dinner to forty men.'

'Do, Caleb!' Ravenswood agreed. 'And see, take my purse.'

But the old man refused it angrily. 'Why should I need your honour's purse,' he said, 'on your own land? I trust we need not pay for what is our own!' And away he went.

The Lord Keeper then began to apologise for his laughter, and Lucy to hope that she had given no pain to the kind and faithful old man.

'Caleb and I must learn,' said the Master proudly, 'to bear cheerfully, or patiently, at least, the ridicule with which poverty is always met.'

'You do yourself injustice, Master,' the Lord Keeper replied, 'I believe that I know more of your affairs than you do yourself; I hope to show that I will help if I may, and that your future is less dark than you think. Meanwhile, I know nothing more to be

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admired than a spirit which rises above misfortune.' All this the Lord Keeper said with an air of cautious respect, as though afraid of wounding the Master's feelings; he seemed both urged on by friendship, and held back by fear of giving offence. It was no wonder that the Master, innocent of intrigue, gave this wily statesman credit for more honesty than might be found in a score of his kind. But he said only that he was indebted to all who thought well of him; after which he excused himself, and left the hall to arrange as best he could for his guests' comfort.

But here he had little choice. He gave up his own room to Miss Ashton, and sent Maisie to wait on her. He next asked for Bucklaw; and being told that he was at the inn, asked Caleb to call on him and tell him of the guests at Wolf's Crag, with a request that he would find, if possible, some place to sleep in the village, since the Lord Keeper could be given no lodging except the secret room. For himself, the Master was content to pass the night in the hall, wrapped in his cloak before the fire. Meanwhile, till dinner could be found, old Maisie offered to the guests such food as she had in her dairy; and the master himself filled in the interval before dinner time, according to an old Scottish custom, by leading Sir William to the top of the tower to admire the view.

XI

Caleb set out towards the village with some secret anxiety. Three difficulties faced him. First, he dared not tell his master how he had treated Bucklaw that day; secondly, he dared not confess that he had been rash in refusing the Master's purse; thirdly, he did not

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wish to meet Bucklaw who, already angered against him, was by this time probably drunk.

Yet it was needful, even without the purse, to save the honour of Wolf's Crag by finding something for dinner; and this was the greatest difficulty of all. The little village of Wolf's Hope, which lay below the castle, had in old days belonged to the Ravenswoods. Even now its people (fishermen and smugglers mostly)looked up to the Master of Ravenswood as their overlord. But as the family grew poorer, nearly all these villagers had managed to buy their freedom; so that by this time they lived independently, and were no longer bound by law to pay to the Ravenswoods a tribute of money, flesh or corn, as their forefathers had been.

Caleb, remembering old customs, never ceased to claim that his master's rights still survived; and for many years the villagers (since men's minds are slow in growing used to freedom) were content to yield to him some part of what their fathers had paid. But of late they had begun to assert their own rights more boldly, and even to call upon the help of the law to support them. Till at last the old servant, finding his demands quite flatly denied, had ceased to press his master's claims, or even to set foot in the village. Yet tonight, since he must either exact some food or else confess the poverty of Wolf's Crag to the stranger-guests, he went down to Wolf's Hope once again, and in its street stood anxiously debating where to begin his attack.

The richest villager was Gibbie Girder, the cooper ;* and although Caleb feared that this man was less likely

* A barrel-maker

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to help than anyone, he resolved to try him first; for his wife's mother Marion, who still lived with him, had been a servant of the Ravenswoods forty years before, and was an old friend to Caleb.

He therefore stepped into the cottage, and pausing near the door where he could not be seen, took note of what was going on there. Before a mirror stood the cooper's wife, dressed in her holiday gown; her mother, no less fine, sat by a blazing fire in charge of two apprentices* who were preparing a meal. But the meal itself was what interested old Caleb. On the fire a huge pot of stew was bubbling; while before it were two spits, turned by the apprentices—the one loaded with meat, the other with a fat goose and some wild ducks. At the far end of the cottage stood a large round table, laid for ten or twelve, as though for some special festival. 'It's a shame,' thought Caleb enviously, 'to see these villagers enjoy so rich a feast. But if some of it does not find its way to Wolf's Crag tonight, my name is not Caleb Balderstone!'

With this resolve, he stepped forward to greet the women, who welcomed him with surprise and joy. 'Why, Mr. Balderstone, is this you! Sit down, sit down! The master of the house will be glad to see you. We are to christen our new baby tonight, and no doubt you will stay?'

'No, no! I just looked in to wish you joy. And as for eating—why, up there at Wolf's Crag we are feasting from morning to night!'

'But you must taste a little!' the women cried.

* Young boys, who live with a craftsman to learn his trade.

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'Nay, I must hurry back……though indeed, rather than offend you by refusing your kindness, I will take something with me in my napkin for my supper to-night—' and he went on to pay a pretty compliment to each of the women, at which they smiled as he wrapped up the puddings they gave him.

'And what is the news at the castle?' asked the cooper's wife.

'The best you ever heard! The Lord Keeper is up there with his fair daughter, ready to give her to my master; and he will add for dowry, I'll be bound, our old lands of Ravenswood!'

'And will the Master take her?' the two women exclaimed: and began to ask Caleb countless questions about the young lady's looks and dress.

'I have no time for talking,' Caleb said. 'Where is the master of the house?'

'He has gone to fetch our minister, Mr. Bide-the-Bent,' Mrs. Girder replied.

'Well, well, I must not stay. But I just wished to tell him quietly some news I have heard up there. Peter Puncheon, who was cooper to the Queen at Leith, is dead; and I dare say that if my master spoke a word to the Lord Keeper, your husband might have his post.'

This hint, as Caleb had foreseen, made the two women more anxious than ever to please him; and they were pressing him again to stay till the cooper returned, when the new baby's cry was heard from an inner room. The women ran out to tend him, and old Caleb was left beside the fire with the two apprentices.

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He pulled out a penny, and offering it to the elder boy (a lad of eleven years) he said—'Take this to the hostess of the inn, and ask her to fill my box with snuff. I will turn the spit till you come back, and she will give you a cake for your trouble.'

But so soon as the boy had gone, old Caleb, looking sternly at the other lad, took up the birds which he had promised to cock, put on his hat, and walked straight out of the cottage. He stopped only at the door of the inn to say briefly, that Mr. Hayston of Bucklaw must not expect a bed in the castle that night.

This message was rudely taken in to Bucklaw, who was highly angered by it. Craigengelt proposed, and all the hunters agreed, that they should overtake old Caleb and toss him in a blanket. But they were stopped by the head-servant of the Lord Keeper himself, who had been sent without the knowledge of Ravenswood to bring up some of the venison to Wolf's Crag. He assured them firmly that Sir William Ashton would be greatly displeased, if any harm befell Caleb. After which he left the inn, with two men carrying as much food as he had been able to buy, and overtook the old man outside the village.

XII

Meanwhile the little boy, who alone had seen what Caleb did, sat as amazed as if he had seen a ghost; and to make things worse, he forgot all about the other spit, which he had been told to turn, and let the meat on it burn. A hearty cuff from Dame Marion aroused him.

'What made you burn the roast, you good-for-nothing?'

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'I don't know.'

'And where is the other fool?'

'I dont know,' said the astonished apprentice, in tears.

'And where's Mr. Balderstone—and above all, what in the world has happened to the spit with the wild-fowl?'

The wife entered now, and joined her mother in so abusing the boy, that for some time he could not tell his story at all; and it was only when the elder boy returned that they began to guess the truth.

'Well, well!' cried Dame Marion, 'who would have thought of Caleb Balderstone playing an old friend such a trick!'

'And what shall I say to my husband!' the other wailed. 'He will kill me, even if there were not another woman in the village!'

'No, no!' said Marion. 'It is bad enough, but not so bad as that. For he must kill me first, and I have made better men than Mr. Girder stand back!'

At this moment the cooper and the minister rode up to the door; and as the night was cold, they made straight for the fire. The two women barred his way, both hoping to keep the truth from him for a while. But he pushed past them, and at once saw that one of the spits was gone. 'What the devil, woman—' he began.

'Fie, for shame!' they both cried at once. 'Will you swear, before Mr. Bide-the-Bent!'

'I am sorry,' the cooper said; and as the minister looked sternly at him, went on—'But let me ask these

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women, why have they dished the birds before we came in?'

'They are not dished,' his wife said. But an accident—'

'What accident?' cried Girder angrily. 'No harm has come to them, I trust?'

His wife dared not reply, but her mother now came forward and said plainly. 'I have given them to a friend of mine. So what now?'

Surprise made Girder dumb. 'You gave away the best part of our dinner!' he exclaimed at last. 'And to whom, pray?'

'To good Mr. Caleb Balderstone, from Wolf's Crag.'

Girder's wrath was terrible. For he had led the villagers, not long ago, in resisting Caleb's orders to send food to the Castle; and the thought that Caleb had his supper made the loss seem worse. He raised his riding-whip, but the elder woman stood firm, holding in her hand the iron ladle with which she had just been basting the meat. This weapon was better than his own, and the old woman's arm as strong as his, so he thought best to turn upon his wife. 'Useless fool! Did you sit still and see my goods given to an idle, drunken and decayed servant, just because he pleased the ears of a silly old woman with some lying tale? I'll give you—'

But here the minister stopped him, while Dame Marion stood before her daughter with the ladle raised. 'For shame, Mr. Girder!' said the clergyman. 'Such anger, and on the night of a father's most solemn duty! And besides, have we not plenty still to eat?'

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'But to have given it to such a one!' the cooper cried. 'To the thieving, lying servant of that old tyrant, Allan Ravenswood—'

'It was not sent to the son of old Lord Ravenswood,' his wife replied. 'It was to help to entertain the Lord Keeper, who is up there at Wolf's Crag.'

'Sir William Ashton at Wolf's Crag!' asked the cooper, amazed. 'He and Ravenswood are the bitterest enemies!'

'They are not,' retorted the mother-in-law. 'Moreover, Peter Puncheon, cooper to the queen, is dead; and his place must be filled—'

'That is true,' put in one of Girder's men, who had entered the house. 'I have seen the Lord Keeper's servants at the inn.'

'And is their master at Wolf's Crag?'

'He is,—and has made friends with Ravenswood, I suppose, since he is lodging there.'

'And Peter Puncheon is dead?'

'Ay, he's gone at last·····and as for the wildfowl, your horse is still saddled, master, and I can catch up with Balderstone.'

'Do so, then—yet stay!' And Girder, taking the man aside, gave him some private orders what to do when he had overtaken Caleb. These, however, were heard by no one else; and when the minister hoped presently that the old man would not be harmed, Girder only said, 'Never fear that, Mr. Bide-the-Bent. I know best how to look after my own affairs. Wife, serve up the dinner, and say no more about it!'

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Meanwhile old Caleb Balderstone had made all the haste he could, not even pausing to talk to the Lord Keeper's man by the way. He said only, that he had told old Marion to cook the birds for him, lest Maisie's fire had been put out by the thunderbolt; after which he pushed on so fast that the others could hardly keep up with him. But before long he heard a horse behind, and a voice calling him to stop. He refused to listen at first; but on finding the horseman overtaking him, turned round and held the spit in readiness to defend himself.

To his surprise, however, the cooper's man addressed him respectfully. His master, he said, was very sorry to have been away when Caleb came to his house; but he now ventured to send after him a small cask of wine, and another of brandy, since he had heard that there were guests at the castle for whom they were not prepared.

Caleb at first was too surprised and joyful to speak, when he found that the cooper, far from taking back his goods, was intending to add to them. But he regained his confidence when the cooper's man, leaning down from his horse, whispered in his ear that if John Girder could be given a chance to succeed to Peter Puncheon's place, he would not forget his gratitude to the Master of Ravenswood; nor to Mr. Balderstone himself, if he might have the pleasure of speaking with him on the subject. To all which, old Caleb made no answer beyond that of all great men from Louis XIV downwards: namely, that 'we will see about it;' and then added aloud, for the benefit of the Lord Keeper's man —'Your master has shown proper respect in sending these liquors, nor will I fail to say

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so to my Lord Ravenswood. You may ride on to the castle; and if none of the servants are returned, you may put the casks into the porter's lodge; the porter has leave to go and see his friends, so you will meet no one to stop you.'

The man rode on; and having put his casks in the empty and ruined lodge, raised his cap to Caleb as he re-passed him on the way back to the village.

XIII

Great was the glory of old Balderstone, as he served up before his guests a feast more royal than any seen in Wolf's Crag since the funeral of its late master. Many a glance he gave them, as it were in reproof for their lack of faith in him. And many a story, more or less true, did he tell afterwards to the Keeper's man about the former greatness of the Ravenswoods.

'A vassal hardly thought a lamb or a calf his own, till he had offered it to the Lord of Ravenswood. In those days, they had to ask his leave to get married. And although times are different now, yet you have seen for yourself that we of Ravenswood still do our best to maintain that just authority, which is in some danger of falling into disuse in these lawless days.'

'And do you find your people willing?' the other asked. 'For I must say that at Ravenswood Castle, now my master's, you have not left behind such obedient tenants.'

'You must remember,' Caleb replied, 'that there has been a change of lords; and that the old master might expect more service than the new one commands.'

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'In that case, the wisest thing would be to make a match between your young lord and our pretty lady. And Sir William might give her your old lands as dowry; for he's quite clever enough to find himself another estate elsewhere.'

Caleb shook his head. 'I wish that may be so,' he said. 'But there are prophecies about this house which I should grieve to see fulfilled; my old eyes have seen evil enough already.'

'Never fear,' said the other. 'If the young couple liked each other, they would make a good match. But I fear that Lady Ashton will have a hand in that, as in all other affairs.'

In the hall, meanwhile, the company had met no less pleasantly. Once Ravenswood decided to receive the Lord Keeper, he thought himself bound to act the part of a well-pleased host; and it often happens, that when a man begins by acting a part, he will end by feeling it. Quite soon the Master found himself sincerely welcoming his guests; though it is hard to tell how far this change in him was due to Miss Ashton's presence, and how far to the smooth and friendly talk of her father. For the Lord Keeper was a veteran statesman, with a deep knowledge of all the turns of public affairs at the end of the seventeenth century. He could talk of men and events which he had known, in a charming way, and with a false air of speaking without any reserve, as though to a trusted friend. So that for all their former enmity, Ravenswood began to find himself both amused and instructed.

Lucy did not speak much, but she smiled; and the girl's gentleness and amiability pleased Ravenswood more than the most brilliant wit. Above all he noticed

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that his guests (whether from gratitude or some other motive) paid as much respect to him as though he had received them with all the splendour proper to his high birth. Even when the poverty of Wolf's Crag could not be hid, they either pretended not to notice it, or else paid him some neat compliment to show how little they thought of such inconveniences, compared with the honour of being his guests. And it may be that the pride of Ravenswood, in finding himself esteemed for his own sake in spite of his poverty, did as much to heal their quarrel as even the Lord Keeper's talk, or the beauty of Lucy Ashton.

In due course, the guests retired to sleep, and while Maisie attended Lucy, the Master himself led the way to the Lord Keeper's room. Caleb set on the table two rude tallow-candles, in their rough wire frames, with as much dignity as though they had been torches of wax. He then brought two jugs, one full of wine, the other of brandy, meaning to leave them with the guest for the night, according to ancient Scottish custom; nor did he hesitate to pretend that the wine had lain in the cellar of Wolf's Crag, for the past twenty years, and the brandy ever since···but here the Lord keeper interrupted him. 'Pray, Mr. Caleb, let me have a jug of water,' he said; and when Caleb doubted lest to drink mere water was a disgrace to the house, the Master smiled.

'If his Lordship fancies water, Caleb, you may obey his wish. It is not long, I think, since water was drunk here—and with pleasure, too!' With that, he began to say good night; but as Caleb left the room, Sir William asked the Master if he might have a word with him privately.

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'Master of Ravenswood' he said after a short pause. 'I hope you are too good a Christian to allow the sun to set on your anger?' And when the young man protested that there was no anger in his heart, the elder replied, 'I had feared otherwise, remembering the various disputes and lawsuits which arose, unhappily and too often, between your late honourable father and myself.'

'I could wish, my lord,' said Ravenswood trembling, 'that you had remembered them anywhere rather than under my father's roof.'

'And I too,' Sir William agreed. 'Yet I must go on, now, with what I mean to say. For indeed, we might both have been spared much unhappiness, if I had once insisted on a personal talk with your father.'

'True,' replied Ravenswood. 'I have heard my father say that your lordship proposed it.'

'Proposed, my dear Master? I indeed proposed, but I ought to have begged and entreated. I ought to have torn away the veil which plotters had stretched between us, and shown myself as I was, willing even to yield some rights in order to keep his friendship. Let me say, my young friend, for so I will call you, that if your father and I had ever met so happily as we two have today, he might be living yet; nor need I have had the pain of parting in enmity from one, whose general character I so admired and honoured.' He paused then, and wiped his eyes; but as the Master was silent he continued.—'You must understand that we had certain disputes, which I thought proper to have decided by law; although I never meant to urge my legal rights beyond the limit of equity.'

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'My lord,' said the Master, 'we need talk no further. What the law gives you, or will give you, you shall enjoy. Neither my father nor myself would have asked any favour of you.'

'Favour? No, you misunderstand. A right may be proved good in law, and yet a man of honour may not care to claim it. Come! There are many things still undecided between us. Can you blame me, an old man wishing peace, and in the castle of one who has saved my daughter's life and my own, if I am anxious to end all such disputes not by law, but by fairness?'

To such a question, it was hardly possible for the Master not to assent. And wishing his guest good-night, he put off any further talk till next day. For a while he paced the hall alone, with an uncertain mind. For he felt that neither as a Ravenswood could he forgive his foe, nor as a Christian avenge himself, but that he was basely swayed between his enmity for the father and his love for the child. 'Yet,' thought he 'if this man really wants no more than the law allows, if he is willing even to temper that with fairness, what complaint can I have against him? He may be a better man than I believed; and his daughter—but I am resolved not to think of her!'

He wrapped his cloak around him, fell asleep, and dreamed of Lucy till dawn gleamed through the windows.

XIV

But the Lord Keeper could not sleep, so beset was he by secret doubts and anxieties. He was by nature timid, despite his cleverness; and his custom had always been to watch for political changes, and to

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make friendships in advance among whatever party seemed most likely to win. The more daring leaders on all sides despised him for this; but as his talents were useful, and his legal knowledge well esteemed, those in power were glad to use and reward them, though without trusting or respecting the man.

Thus, the Marquis of A—had worked ably and powerfully to change the Scottish cabinet, and seemed likely very soon to succeed; yet the Lord Keeper seemed to him a man worth winning to his side; so he entrusted to a friend, who knew Sir William's character, the task of converting him. This gentleman had come to Ravenswood Castle as though on a friendly visit, and soon found that what the Lord keeper chiefly feared was Ravenswood's threat of violence. To this fear the visitor now added another, equally strong; for he inquired, as though in sympathy, whether Sir William's lawsuits with the Ravenswoods had been fully decided, and were past hope of appeal. And when told that this was so, he pointed out that under the new Treaty of Union some of the old disputes were able to be tried afresh, by the House of Peers in London. This could not be denied; and when the Lord Keeper hoped, that Ravenswood lacked friends strong enough to support him in London, his visitor said—

'Do not comfort yourself with that false hope. In the next parliament, young Ravenswood may find more friends even than your lordship. Such things have been seen ere now. There are men at the head of affairs today, whose lives were in danger a few years ago; and many a high head has been brought low among us. Not even your long services nor legal

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knowledge will save you, if the Marquis of A—comes into power in the English Parliament. He is a kinsman of young Ravenswood, and will no doubt help him. So, if these lawsuits are revised by the House of Peers, you may find the Marquis against you. You will look back in vain on your past services. In these slippery times, it will be present service and prompt friendship which will be expected by a man like the Marquis.'

The Lord Keeper now saw clearly what his guest implied, and answered cautiously, that he was always ready to serve the Marquis in any way, which did not cross his duty to his king and country. After this, he declined to say any more. So his guest left, without having made the wily old statesman commit himself, but in the certainty that at least he had roused his fears. He next told the Marquis what Sir William had said; and the two agreed that their best plan would be to keep the Lord Keeper uneasy, especially while Lady Ashton was away from home. Her proud spirit, they feared, was likely to supply Sir William with the courage he lacked. She belonged wholly to the party still in power; and without fearing Ravenswood as her husband did, she hated him far more bitterly because the ancient dignity of his family outshone her husband's new greatness. She was now absent, first in Edinburgh and later in London, on some political intrigue against the Marquis's party; and it seemed wise to press her husband hard before she came back.

It was for this reason that the Marquis had written to Ravenswood, as we have seen. And he moreover told his messenger to take care to mention, when near Ravenswood Castle, that he was carrying very import-

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ant matters from the Marquis to Ravenswood; knowing well that such a piece of news was bound to reach the Lord Keeper's ears.

Sir William thus became more anxious than ever. For of late years, appeals made from the Scottish courts to the English Parliament had often succeeded; and since the honesty of English law was then little known in Scotland, the Lord Keeper dreaded lest his disputes with Ravenswood might be re-judged, not in accordance with strict justice, but under the influence of the Marquis of A—, and on the old bad principle of 'Show me the man, and I will show you the law.' He kept hearing, too, how well the Marquis's political plots were succeeding; and his timidity urged him to secure the old nobleman's favour in good time, by making friends with his kinsman. The affair of the wild bull seemed to offer a chance; and it even occurred to the Lord Keeper, that if young Ravenswood were likely to gain some high post in the state, a match between him and Lucy might be no bad plan, and might secure the Ashtons' ownership of most of the Ravenswood lands.

So thinking, the Lord Keeper had accepted a neighbour's invitation to hunt, in a country not far from Wolf's Crag, and had taken his daughter with him. He had been careful, as we know, to do the Master some service, should he chance to attend the hunt; and, by the accident of the thunderstorm, had been able to make his plan succeed far better even than he had hoped. Yet it was not without a secret terror that he had found himself, at last, shut up in the lonely tower of Wolf's Crag; a place well fitted, from its strength and solitude, to be a scene of

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violence and vengeance. The Master's stern reception, and his own difficulty in revealing himself, had increased these fears. And although, later on, the Master's frankness put him more at his ease, he saw clearly that it was to Lucy's grace and beauty that the change in his host's behaviour was due.

Alone now, in the bare room which was more like a prison than a bedchamber, and with the hoarse sound of the waves rushing against the rock below, he felt his doubts and fears return. He was uncertain also on another question, troublesome to many a good husband who has tried to act for himself—'What will my wife—what will Lady Ashton say?' But at last he came to the resolve so often reached by weak minds—namely to watch events, and to act in whatever way seemed best as the need arose—and so fell asleep.

XV

Next morning the Master's face was gloomy again. He too had passed the night in thought rather than in sleep; and his new love for Lucy Ashton had to fight against his old hatred of her father. But the Lord Keeper was determined that their friendship should ripen. So he took Ravenswood aside, and asked him patiently to hear an explanation of the unhappy disputes that had grown up between them. The Master's cheeks grew red; and as the other began a full account of certain legal details, Ravenswood interrupted him.

'Not here,' he said, 'can I listen to your account of the quarrel between us. Not here, where my father died of a broken heart—lest I recall the duty of a son and forget that of a host. A time must come when we can freely discuss such things. Meanwhile, your

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frankness makes me wish to believe that I have misjudged your character as a man; and that things may have seemed right to you, as a lawyer, which to me seem little less than injustice.'

'Dear Master,' replied Sir William, 'I have failed equally to understand you. I was told that you were rash and fierce, more ready to appeal to force than to justice. Since we have both been wrong, will you not listen while, at least, I explain our points of difference?'

But the Master refused. 'It is in the English House of Peers,' he said, 'that we must argue together. If they decide against me, I have still my sword, and can follow arms wherever a trumpet shall sound.'

With these firm words, he raised his eyes, and met those of Lucy Ashton, who had drawn near unseen. She was gazing in admiration on the fine figure of Ravenswood, whose unhappy fortunes and whose bold endurance had won more than her interest. Both blushed as their eyes met, and turned apart; but Sir William was watching them closely. 'I need fear no appeal to Parliament,' he said to himself. 'For I shall have good means of making friends with this rash young fellow, if he grows dangerous—!' Nor, in his cruel plot, did he care what pain he might give Ravenswood, nor even his daughter; as though her love were no more than—a candle flame, which could be lit or put out at his will.

Old Caleb now came to summon them to breakfast, and to present to the Lord Keeper a draught of wine in a large pewter cup; pretending that the silver bowl, in which it should have been served, was being repaired by a silversmith in Edinburgh. He then

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told his master that a man was before the gate, asking to speak with him.

This proved to be Captain Craigengelt—his nose red from the brandy which he had drunk, his laced hat set a little aside on his black wig, a sword by his side and pistols in his holsters—just like a highwayman.

'I suppose,' said Ravenswood coldly, 'that you have come upon no business too important to be told here at the gate. For I have guests in the castle, and do not care to ask you to join them.'

'I have no wish to force myself upon you,' Craigengelt said, 'but have come only to bear a message from my friend, Mr. Hayston of Bucklaw.' After which he pointed out that Bucklaw had been insulted by the Master of Ravenswood, and must therefore challenge him to fight a duel.

Ravenswood, knowing nothing of how Caleb had shut out Bucklaw the night before, concluded that Captain Craigengelt was drunk and had invented the challenge. In any case, he said, he would accept no such message from so dishonourable a ruffian as he knew Craigengelt to be, and bade him leave the castle at once.

'Castle!' cried Craigengelt, with a malice which even his fear could not check. 'Why, this place is worse than a robber's house, where they receive travellers to plunder them!'

'You insolent rascal,' cried the Master, raising his cane. 'Be off, without another word, or I will beat you to death!'

As the fellow galloped off, the Master saw Sir William watching them from the courtyard. 'I have seen that Mr. Craigengelt before,' the lawyer observed.

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'He was brought up for trial, not two weeks ago, before the Privy Council in Edinburgh—But this concerns yourself,' he continued, taking the Master aside. 'For as you know, the best and wisest of us are today exposed to the malice of rascals; and had I myself been ready to listen to such, not long ago, you might by this time have been either in prison at Edinburgh, or in exile abroad....'

The Master could only stare at him in surprise when he heard these words; and the Lord Keeper, opening the case in which his private papers lay, now made haste to use the chance of winning over the Master, which he had so eagerly desired. Without a word, he handed to young Ravenswood some documents, containing an account of the riot (as it was termed) at his father's funeral, with the evidence laid by witnesses before the Privy Council, and (what was more important) with a record of the Lord Keeper's plea on Ravenswood's behalf. After which he left the Master to himself and joined Lucy at breakfast.

Ravenswood read the papers several times, as though to make sure of the truth. Then, rising hastily, he followed the Lord Keeper, clasped his hand, and asked pardon for the injustice he had done to one, who now seemed to have been his protector. The statesman received him first with *well-feigned surprise, then with a pretence of frank* friendship; and the tears came to Lucy's eyes as her father exclaimed 'My dear Master, what have you to thank me for, that you would not have done yourself? You have paid me a thousand times in saving my daughter's life—you acting as a gallant soldier, myself as an upright judge.

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'My generous friend!' said Ravenswood; and in that one word, renounced his feudal enmity and frankly sought his old foe's forgiveness. Lucy smiled through her tears, and gave him her hand; and even her father forgot, for the time at least, the Master's poverty and the sure wrath of Lady Ashton.

By and by, the Master recalled Sir William's words about Craigengelt. He asked their meaning, and was told that the Captain had accused him, to the Privy Council, of intending to join the Jacobites; but that neither the Marquis of A—nor the Lord Keeper himself had been willing to believe such a tale. As Sir William had foreseen, this increased the Master's gratitude still further; and they sat down to breakfast on the friendliest possible terms.

XVI

While his guests made ready to depart, the Master sought out Caleb; whom he informed, with some hesitation, that he was going back with the Lord Keeper to Ravenswood Castle, to stay for a day or two.

'May heaven forbid!' cried the old man, turning very pale.

'And why, Caleb, should heaven forbid me to return the Lord Keeper's visit?'

'Oh sir,' replied Caleb 'I am your servant, and it is not for me to speak—yet I am old, and have served both your father and grandfather—'

'And what of this?'

'Oh Mr. Edgar—that is, my lord—you know well that your father's son should not be friends with him —and indeed Thomas the Rhymer, who could not speak falsely, spoke a word that will prove too true, if you go there this day—' And when the Master

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pressed him for his meaning, he disclosed a prophecy which had been made about the house of Ravenswood, very many years ago—

> When the last Lord of Ravenswood to Ravenswood shall ride,
> And woo a dead maiden to be his bride,
> He shall stable his steed in the Kelpie's Flow,
> And his name shall be lost for evermoe*!

'I know the Kelpie's Flow,' said the Master. 'For I suppose you mean the quicksand between here and Wolf's Hope. But why any man should stable his steed there—'

'God forbid that we should know, sir, what the prophecy means! But stay here, and let the strangers go.'

'Well, Caleb, thanks for your advice. But as I do not go to Ravenswood to seek a bride, dead or alive, I hope I shall choose a better stable for my horse than the Kelpie's quicksand; for I remember how it swallowed up a troop of horsemen, only ten years ago.' Nor could all Caleb's prayers change the Master's mind. In the end he let him go, with a last word of warning—namely to beware of drinking at the Mermaid's Well in the park of Ravenswood—and after seeing the party leave, returned alone to Wolf's Crag with a heavy heart.

Meanwhile the riders went forward gladly. Having once made up his mind, Ravenswood was not the man to hesitate; and he began to enjoy Miss Ashton's company, with a feeling as near to gaiety as his proud spirit allowed. The Lord Keeper secretly rejoiced at having made peace with so feared an enemy, and even began to hope that Lady Ashton might share his joy. 'For what better match,' thought he, 'could

* evermore.

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any mother desire, than one which settles such a dangerous claim, and brings her a son-in-law so noble, brave and well-born as the Master of Ravenswood? Surely no reasonable woman would pause—' And then he began to doubt again; knowing well that Lady Ashton was sometimes less reasonable than he would wish her to be.

It was dark before they entered the avenue of Ravenswood Castle, a long road between huge elms, which sighed in the night-wind as though in sorrow for the heir of the Ravenswoods. The Master himself fell silent, and his face was very grave as he got down from his horse, and stood in the hall no longer his, with the many servants of the new owner around him. In the large reception-room, to which he was now led, he saw many changes, all of which bore witness to Sir William's greater wealth. The tattered tapestry was gone, and in its place was a rich wainscot of carved oak. Several old family-portraits of famous Ravenswoods, together with old armour and weapons, had given place to pictures of the King and Queen of England, of some Scottish lawyers, and of the parents of the Lord Keeper himself with their sour, peevish faces—' Scarecrows,' thought Ravenswood, 'to make room for whom my ancestors have been torn down from the walls which they built!' There were also portraits of Sir William and Lady Ashton, from which it was obvious at the first glance that the Lord Keeper, despite the splendour of his state robes, was no match for the proud and strong-minded lady whom he had married, if their wills should clash.

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By and by the Master asked his host, if he knew what had become of the portraits which used to hang there. 'Why,' answered the Keeper with some hesitation, 'we were not here, when the changes in this room were made. I hope—I believe they are safe—I am sure I gave orders—when they are found I hope you will accept them from me?'

The Master bowed stiffly, and resumed his survey of the room. But he was soon to learn more surely where the old portraits were; for at this moment Lucy's younger brother came in—an ill-mannered boy, who at once began clamouring to have his father answer some question about the stag which had been killed in the recent hunt. He paid no attention to the Master, who stood with his back to them at the far end of the room, looking at the pictures; until the Lord Keeper, unable to answer his question, said—'That gentleman, Henry, can tell you all about it. Go, speak to him. It is the Master of Ravenswood.'

The boy ran to him, and pulled him by the coat with the freedom of a spoilt child, saying—'I say, sir, if you please to tell me—' But when the Master turned, and Henry saw his face, he became suddenly dumb. The Master asked him to repeat his question, but he backed away in fear, with his eyes fixed on Ravenswood, until he once more reached his father, to whom he clung trembling.

'Why do you not speak to the Master?' the Lord Keeper asked.

'I am afraid,' said Henry, in a very low tone.

'Afraid, you goose!' said his father, shaking him, 'What makes you afraid?'

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'What makes him so like the picture of Sir Malise Ravenswood?' whispered the boy. 'I tell you, he is as like it as if he had jumped out of the canvas; and it is up in the old hall where the servants wash the clothes—though it has armour, not a coat like the gentleman, and a beard too—'

'And why should not the gentleman be like his ancestor, you silly boy?' asked the Lord Keeper.

'Ay, but if he is come to chase us all out of the castle,' whispered the boy, who recalled the legend of the black bull's head, 'and has twenty men at his back—and is come to say, with a hollow voice, '*I bide my time*'—and is to kill you on the hearth as Malise did the other man, whose blood is still to be seen—!'

'Hush! Nonsense!' said the lord Keeper, not at all pleased to be reminded of such things. 'Master, here comes my servant to say supper is served.'

At the same instant Lucy entered too, having changed her dress. At the sight of her beauty, all the gloomy thoughts which had oppressed the Master of Ravenswood were swept away; and she seemed like an angel, unallied to the coarser mortals among whom for a time, she lived.

XVII

That night, the feast at Ravenswood Castle was as rich as that at Wolf's Crag had been poor. The Lord Keeper might feel pride at the contrast, but he was careful not to let it appear. The evening was spent at ease; and Henry had so far overcome his fears, that he arranged to hunt next day with the descendant of grim Sir Malise of Ravenswood. Another banquet followed, and the Master agreed to stay for one day more, that he might visit his old servant Alice.

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He set out with Lucy and young Henry; but the boy kept straying into the woods with his hound, and the other two were mostly alone. They talked as friends; and so deep was Lucy's sympathy, that the Master almost felt repaid for the pain which his visit to Ravenswood caused him. Indeed, he said as much, and Lucy listened with more confusion than displeasure. But his conscience checked him when he found himself on the verge of speaking of love to the daughter of Sir William Ashton.

They found old Alice sitting, as usual, by her cottage door. 'I hear your step, Miss Ashton,' she called as they drew near. 'But the gentleman with you is not my lord, your father. It is the firm and hasty step of youth that I hear—' the old lady paused doubtfully, and then went on 'Could I believe so strange a thought, I should say it was the step of a Ravenswood.'

'Your ears are sharp indeed, Alice,' the Master exclaimed. 'I am the Master of Ravenswood—Son of your old lord.'

The old lady gave a cry of surprise. 'You—! In this place, and in this company—.' Still doubtful, she passed her hand across the Master's face. 'But what do you here, Master of Ravenswood—in the land of your enemy, and with his child?' Her face and tone were stern; and Lucy answered, troubled—'the Master is on a visit to my father.'

'Heaven's ways are not like ours,' the old woman murmured. Then Sternly, to Ravenswood, she said, 'Young man, your fathers were fierce; but they were honourable foes. But you--what have *you* to do with the Lord Keeper's daughter? He who seeks revenge dishonourably—'

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'Be silent, woman!' cried Ravenswood. 'This young lady has not a friend on earth who would do more to save her from wrong.'

'Is it so?' asked old Alice in a voice changed and sad. 'Then God help you both!'

'Amen, Alice! said Lucy, who had not fully understood the old lady's meaning. 'But if, instead of welcoming people, you speak so strangely, they will think of you as others do.'

'That is,' whispered Henry, who had come up to Ravenswood, 'that she is a witch, who should be burned like the rest.'

But the sharp old woman heard, and looked so stern that Lucy drew Henry away. 'Come, Henry, Alice, wants to speak with the Master alone. We will wait,' she added, looking at Ravenswood, 'by the Mermaid's Well.'

Alice said nothing till she knew that the two were gone. Then, turning to Ravenswood—'And are you, too, angry with me for my love?'

'Not angry,' said the Master. 'Only surprised, that you should suspect me unjustly.' But the old lady stopped him.

'When did a Ravenswood seek out his enemy, save for revenge?' she asked. 'You come here, Edgar Ravenswood, either in fatal anger, or in still more fatal love!'

'In neither,' said Ravenswood; but his voice trembled, and Alice went on swiftly—'It is so! She waits by the Mermaid's Well. That place has often been called fatal to the race of Ravenswood. But it has never seemed more likely to prove so, than it does today! Young man, are you willing to take a lower

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place in the house which was once your father's own?' To live on the bounty of his proud successor? To ally yourself with the Lord Keeper, and call your father's murderer your honoured father-in-law? Master of Ravenswood, I am the eldest servant of your house, and I would rather see you dead!'

For awhile the Master paced to and fro in silence, trembling. Then he said, 'Woman! Near to death yourself, do you dare to urge your master's son to revenge?'

'God forbid!' said Alice solemnly. 'And therefore, I bid you leave this fatal place. You can have nothing in common with the people here. So, begone from them!'

'I will think of what you say,' replied Ravenswood presently. 'I believe you mean well to me, though you have spoken too freely·····Yet I have heard my mother praise you,' he went on after a pause, 'for your sense and fidelity. You are no fool, like Caleb Balderstone, to fear old superstitions. Tell me clearly where my danger lies, if you know of any. I believe, that I have no such feelings towards Miss Ashton as you suspect. I have business with Sir William—when it is done, I shall go. For I have no more wish to stay in a place so sad for me, than you have to see me here.'

Alice turned her sightless eyes towards the ground, and for some time thought deeply. At last she said—'I will speak the truth. For better or for worse, I will tell you why I fear·····Lucy Ashton loves you, Lord of Ravenswood.'

'Impossible,' said the Master.

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'I know it only too well,' replied the blind woman, 'I have talked often with her, and know that she has thought of no one else since you saved her from death. To know this, if you are a gentleman and your father's son, will be enough to make you fly from her presence. Without you, her love will die like a lamp without oil; but if you stay, the end can be only the ruin of both of you. I tell you this secret unwillingly; but you must soon have learnt it for yourself, and it is better that you should know it from me. And now, go! If you remain Sir William's guest without meaning to marry his daughter, you are a villain; but if you mean to ally yourself with him, you are a fool, and are doomed!'

So saying, the old blind woman arose, and closing her cottage door behind her, left Ravenswood to his own thoughts.

XVIII

These thoughts were sadly confused. His joy in Lucy's company, deep though it was, had never quite conquered his dislike to marrying his foe's daughter. Yet if Alice were right, his honour now required that he should leave at once, or else seek her hand. But what if he were refused? 'I wish her well,' he told himself, 'and for her sake forgive her father. But I will never see her more!'

And now he came to a place where two paths met—the one leading to the Castle, the other to the Mermaid's Well. As he paused, wondering how he should excuse himself for his hurried flight, young Henry ran up. He was all eagerness, it seemed, to go with the forester on his rounds but his sister feared to walk home alone, and awaited the Master's escort. To Ravenswood, doubtful as he was which path to take,

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this turned the scale; and as Henry hurried off, he made towards the Well. 'It can do little harm,' he thought, 'to see her once more; and I ought in courtesy to tell her I am leaving the castle.'

Lucy was seated by the fountain. Wrapped in her cloak, with her hair escaping from the hood, she might have recalled to Ravenswood the old tale of the Nymph of the Well. But he saw in her only a most beautiful girl, more dear since he now knew that she loved him. His resolve melting as he gazed, he sat down not far from her, and for awhile both were silent.

'I like this spot,' said Lucy presently. 'And I have heard there is some old story about it.

'It has been thought a fatal spot to the Ravenswoods,' he replied. 'And it is so to me at least; for here I saw you first, and here must take leave of you for ever.'

Lucy turned pale. 'But why? I know Alice dislikes my father. But I know, too, how grateful he is to you. And he is powerful, with strong friends—he is already working on your behalf with the Council.'

'It may be so,' said Ravenswood proudly. 'Yet as a soldier, I must win success for myself. And I have all I need—a sword, a bold heart and a strong hand.'

Lucy hid her face in her hands, but Ravenswood saw she was crying. 'Forgive me,' he begged, taking her right hand, 'I am too rough to deal with one so gentle as you. Forget me,' and let me go, sure that I can meet no harder fate than to have parted from you!' Lucy wept on, but her tears were less bitter; for the more the Master spoke of going, the more sure was

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she that he would rather stay. Until at last, instead of saying farewell, he gave his faith to her for ever, and received hers in return. The whole passed so suddenly, and arose so swiftly from the impulse of the moment, that before the Master could reflect on what he had done, their lips, as well as their hands, had sealed their love.

'And now,' he said, 'I must speak to Sir William —he must know. I cannot stay with him to love you in secret.'

'No, no!' cried Lucy, 'First, you must win success. He will consent, I think—but my mother—'

'I can write to her.'

'Would it not be better to wait for a few weeks? If she could see you—know you—I am sure she would approve. But you have never met, and the old feud between our families—'

The Master's keen dark eyes were fixed on her earnestly. 'Lucy,' he said, 'for your sake I have given up a vengeance, long thought out, and vowed to in heathen fashion. On the night of my father's funeral I cut a lock from my hair; and as it burnt in the fire, I swore that my revenge should pursue his enemies until they were consumed likewise.'

'It was a deadly sin!' said Lucy, turning pale.

'It would have been far worse to keep such a vow. For your sake I broke it—nor would I speak of it today, but to make clear to you the price at which I have bought your love. That I have sold the honour of my house for you, I neither say nor think; but the world may do both. Therefore, think well how much I prize your love, and how I must suffer if you should break your faith.'

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'And why should you think that possible? Is it because I ask you to keep silent for awhile? Bind me by what vow you please. For though no vows are needed to secure my faith, they may prevent your doubting it!'

The dispute thus raised was ended soon, by the lovers going through an ancient rite in witness of their promise. They broke between them a gold coin; and binding each their halves nearest their hearts, they swore that never, while they wore these tokens, should either love elsewhere.

And now, as they recalled how long they had delayed by the Mermaid's Well, young Henry came running back to them, and they returned to the Castle together. The Lord Keeper, anxious at the length of their stay, met them in the hall. 'Had Lucy been in any other company,' he confessed, 'I should have been uneasy. But with the Master of Ravenswood, I knew that she had nothing to fear.'

The young lovers looked confused, and no doubt the lawyer observed it. But it was not his present plan to seem curious. He wished to hold the Master bound, while remaining free himself. He did not suspect that Lucy might upset his plot by returning the love of Ravenswood; even if she did, he thought, a visit to Edinburgh or London, with new lovers to wait on her, would soon distract her mind.

Meanwhile he was more anxious for her to hold Ravenswood than to repel him. For he had had that day a letter from the Marquis of A—, who announced that he was shortly starting on a journey southward, and proposed spending a few days at Ravenswood as the Lord Keeper's guest. Sir William at once agreed

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but in his heart he resolved that he would make no further promises to the Marquis of A—than his own interests required. Two things delighted him above all—the presence of Ravenswood, and the absence of his own lady. While Ravenswood was with him, he foresaw that he need not commit himself so deeply to the old Marquis's plots, as he might otherwise have been bound to do. And since his present purpose was to delay his actions, and to keep the Marquis in doubt, Lucy would surely be a better hostess than her mother, who would most likely wreck his cautious schemes by her proud and unyielding temper.

He therefore begged the Master to stay and receive his kinsman; and the Master assented readily, since what had passed between him and Lucy took away all reasons why he should want to go. And so, with a pomp and luxury unusual in Scotland at that remote time, the Castle was made ready to receive its guest.

XIX

Sir William Ashton's wealth was new enough for him to love displaying it; he took part in the preparations for the Marquis's visit with such zeal, that no detail however mean escaped him; and his conduct roused in Ravenswood a scorn, which Lucy could not fail to observe. 'The Marquis honours him by coming here,' said the Master one night when they were alone. 'But his care for such miserable details makes me lose patience. I would rather endure the poverty of Wolf's Crag, than the wealth of Ravenswood Castle.'

'And yet,' said Lucy, 'care for such small details won him the estate—'

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'Which my fathers sold for lack of it! So be it! A porter still must bear a burden, though the burden be gold.'

Lucy sighed. She saw too plainly how her lover scorned the ways of a father, whose fondness had often atoned for her mother's harshness. In religion, too, the lovers soon found their differences. Sir William, being a Whig, had brought up his family in the Presbyterian faith which the Whig party supported, but for which the Master as a High-Churchman had little sympathy. Lucy again, for all her love, felt a secret awe of his proud character. His ideas were fierce and free; and he, in turn, saw in Lucy a soft nature far too apt to be swayed by those with whom she lived. He would have liked her to be more independent; yet she was so beautiful, and so in love with him, that he felt that the softness of her mind made her even dearer to him, as one who needed his protection and had entrusted her fate to his care. If they had known each other better before plighting their faith, she might have feared him too much ever to love him, and he have thought her too weakminded to be worth his regard. As it was, Lucy only feared that his pride might some day make him regret his love: Ravenswood, that a nature so gentle as hers might be induced, if he were not by her side, to renounce him. 'But believe me,' Lucy said, one day when she guessed his fears, 'that though I would never marry without my parents' leave, yet nothing would ever persuade me to marry another man, without yours.'

The lovers had ample time to talk. For the Lord Keeper spent his days alone, in letter-writing, and in

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gathering all the news he could about the expected change in Scottish politics. He seemed not to notice how much time his daughter and Ravenswood spent together; so that the neighbours soon concluded that he meant them for each other. In truth, his only motive was to avoid doing anything, till he knew how far the Marquis was likely to help Ravenswood; but in this, like many cunning persons, he was acting unwisely.

Among those who blamed the Lord Keeper for his inactivity was Mr. Hayston of Bucklaw,—now Laird* of Girnington, since his great-aunt was at last dead. Bucklaw was poor on longer; but although Captain Craigengelt was still his constant companion, whether for sport or drinking, he was unable to persuade young Bucklaw to waste the money for which he had waited so eagerly. Yet Bucklaw was generous, and the Captain knew how to make himself an amusing companion; so that he still had some influence upon Bucklaw, however much the latter despised him.

Now, Craigengelt had not forgiven the scorn of Ravenswood; and, hating the Master, did his best to renew the quarrel between him and Bucklaw. At first, Bucklaw paid little heed to him. 'I think,' he said, 'the Master has not treated me as a gentleman. But he gave me my life once, so we are on equal terms there. Should he interfere with me in future, however, I shall call him to account.'

Next, Craigengelt had tried to draw his friend into the plots of the Jacobites; but here he failed again, for Bucklaw had no mind to put himself in danger of the law. Till at last the Captain, finding himself still

* A country land-owner.

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rebuked, had cried one night, 'Well, name what toast you will, and I will promise to drink to it.'

'Then we will drink to Miss Lucy Ashton,' Bucklaw said, raising his glass. Craigengelt did likewise.

'The prettiest girl in the county!' he exclaimed. 'What a pity her father means to throw her away upon that proud beggar, Ravenswood!'

'That's not so certain···Fill your glass again, Captain, and I will tell you a secret. But you must ride two hundred miles for me.'

'A thousand!' Craigengelt cried. 'Let me saddle my horse—'

'First listen,' said his friend. 'You know I have a kinswoman in England, Lady Blenkensop. When I was poor, she never gave me a thought; but now the case is altered. She is a friend of Lady Ashton, the Keeper's wife—or, I may say, the Lord the Keeper's Lady Keeper—who is now staying with her on the way home from London. These ladies have been used to manage their family affairs without consulting their husbands; and have now formed a plan, to marry Lucy Ashton to me, of which Sir William knows nothing. You may suppose I was a little surprised, to find that a matter so important to me had been almost settled, before I had heard of it!'

'And what did you say?' asked Craigengelt.

'First, that I would not allow two meddling old women to dispose of me so; but in the end, that the thing was reasonable, and would suit me well enough. I like the girl very well. And after Ravenswood's behaviour shutting me out of doors to dine with the servants—why, Craigengelt, I will never forgive him till I have played him as good a trick!'

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'You are right,' the Captain cried. 'And if you take this girl from him, it will break his heart.

'It will not, His heart is all armed in reason and philosophy—things we know nothing about. But it will break his pride, which is what I desire.'

'And you will do it,' Craigengelt flattered him. 'He is ugly—tall enough, to be sure; yet a light, strong, middlesized young fellow like you will win her sooner!'

'You would say as much,' said Bucklaw scornfully, 'if I were hunch-backed. Yet listen. Things have come so far, that I have agreed for Lady Ashton to arrange the match when she returns home. Meanwhile they want me to send a trusty person with some writings—'

'I will ride to the end of the world!' the Captain cried.

'Anyone could carry the writings. You will have more to do. You must let Lady Ashton know, as it were by accident, of Ravenswood's visit to the Lord Keeper; and you may say that all the neighbours talk of the Marquis's coming, as they suppose, to arrange a match between Ravenswood and the Keeper's daughter. I want to hear what she will say. For if she favours Ravenswood, I may give up hope.'

'No fear of that!' the Captain exclaimed. 'But I will bring her here at a gallop, like a cow chased by a nest of wasps—'

'Here is money,' Bucklaw added, 'to buy new clothes and pay the cost of your journey. You may ride my black horse, and I will make you a present of him. And now, step down to the cellar and bring up a bottle of the Burgundy of 1678—or half a dozen bottles. And we will make a night of it!'

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XX

Craigengelt, as the friend of Mr. Hayston of Bucklaw, was welcomed by both Lady Blenkensop and Lady Ashton, and at once set about fulfilling his task. He found Lady Ashton well content with the match which her friend had proposed; for Bucklaw, (no longer poor and reckless, but a respected landowner) was just the sort of husband she desired for her 'Lammermoor Shepherdess.' Moreover, his new lands gave him some political influence in the neighbourhood; Lady Ashton had long hoped that her son Sholto might become Member of Parliament for this district, and foresaw that Bucklaw could help him; which Craigengelt promised that his friend would certainly do.

The Captain next took care to mention the report which he had heard, that the Lord Keeper favoured quite a different match—namely with Ravenswood, who was now at the Castle. The effect of his words on Lady Ashton was evident, from her flushed cheek and flashing eyes; and her anger was all the greater, because the Lord Keeper had written nothing of such a plan to her. Next day at dawn, she set out with Craigengelt on the road to Scotland.

The unhappy Lord Keeper little guessed what a storm was travelling towards him. At any moment he expected the Marquis of A—, now not far off; and he took Lucy and Ravenswood with him to the flat roof above the Castle gate, to watch for the nobleman's arrival. From this roof they could see two roads, leading from different directions towards the Castle and meeting near the gate of the avenue; and on the westward road they spied, ere long, the

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Marquis's party approaching. Two footmen ran in front; and behind these rose a cloud of dust, raised by the Marquis's state-coach and the horsemen who rode by it. But suddenly Henry cried—'There is another coach and six, on the east road, papa! Can they both belong to the Marquis?'

Sure enough, another coach was coming down the hill from the east, so fast that it was uncertain which would first enter the avenue. The Lord Keeper began to tremble, for no neighbour would have approached in such a way without sending word. And Lucy herself turned pale. 'It is my mother!' she cried, and clasped her hands as she looked at Ravenswood. With that she retired in fear; and as the Lord Keeper hastened down to the great gate, Ravenswood was left alone. 'I must watch how this will end,' thought he proudly. 'For if I find I am not welcome here, I shall leave at once.'

Meanwhile the drivers of the two coaches had seen each other and began to race for the gate. But when Lady Ashton found she could not easily win, she made her coachman pull up, and let the visitor drive into the avenue ahead of her, while she followed at some distance. At the door Sir William waited, much perplexed, with Henry and Lucy by him and a crowd of servants behind. He received the Marquis—a tall, well-made man, with a thoughtful and clever face—with the usual compliments of welcome; but his uneasiness was betrayed by an odd mistake, for he presented Lucy to his lordship as 'my wife, Lady Ashton……I should say, my daughter,' he went on as the Marquis looked surprised. 'But the truth is, I saw

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Lady Ashton's carriage following your lordship's, and—'

'Make no apology, my lord,' the Marquis replied. 'Let me beg you to meet your lady, and leave me to Miss Ashton. I am shocked that my people should have preceded our hostess at her own gate; but as you know, I thought that she was still in the south.' And he went in with Lucy.

But when Lady Ashton alighted, she paid no attention to the Lord Keeper at all, and without seeming to see him made her way to the hall, where the others were waiting,—very ill at ease, except the Marquis of A—, who was talking to Ravenswood. The Marquis at once saluted her, and said—'This is a peace-making visit, and so I beg to present my cousin, the young Master of Ravenswood.'

The two could not choose but bow; but they did so scornfully; and as the servants brought in wine, Lady Ashton begged to be excused, and called her husband aside. Once alone with him, her wrath broke loose, and she overwhelmed him with a storm of bitter reproaches, 'But—but how have I displeased you?' stammered the wretched man.

'By turning traitor to your political party—and by being on the point of marrying Lucy to a beggarly Jacobite, the enemy of your house!'

In vain the Lord Keeper urged that Ravenswood had saved Lucy's life, in vain he tried to appease her. She insisted angrily that he should go down at once, tell Ravenswood that room was needed at the Castle for Craigengelt and Mr. Hayston of Bucklaw, and request him to leave the place. But this the Lord Keeper still refused to do.

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'Then it will fall to me, to support the family honour' his lady replied; and sitting down, she wrote a few lines and sent them by a servant to Ravenswood.

'I wash my hands of it entirely,' said the Lord Keeper in despair. And without another word, he went down into the garden, where he stayed long enough to give his lady's temper time to explode, and to let the first wrath of Ravenswood pass over. But when he returned, the Marquis was angrily giving orders to his own servants, with Lady Ashton's letter in his hand. 'I presume, Sir William' said he, 'that you have read this singular letter to my kinsman—and of course, that you will accept my farewell. My kinsman has gone already.'

The Lord Keeper had begun to stammer an apology, which the Marquis ignored, when his lady herself appeared and bowed haughtily. The Marquis was just about to speak, but she intervened. 'I am very sorry, my lord, that this unpleasantness should interrupt the respect due to your lordship—but so it is. Mr. Edgar Ravenswood has abused my husband's friendship, to persuade his daughter into an engagement of which we cannot approve.'

'It is the first time I have heard of it,' said the Marquis coldly. 'But since you speak of it, allow me to say that my kinsman's rank entitled him at least to a civil refusal, even though he dared to raise his eyes to the daughter of Sir William Ashton—' And then, giving up his irony, he went on—'Come, madam, I know how matters stand. Old enmities are hard to heal—yet I had hoped to heal them. I am still unwilling to leave you in anger, and shall not follow the

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Master of Ravenswood till the afternoon. Let us talk over this matter more coolly.'

'It is what I anxiously desire, my lord,' said Sir William eagerly. 'Lady Ashton, we will not permit my lord of A—to leave us in displeasure—'

'The castle,' said the lady, 'is at the Marquis's command, so long as he cares to stay. But, as for further talk of this—'

'Pardon me, good madam,' the Marquis said. 'I cannot let you come to any hasty decision on so important a subject. I see more guests are here; nor will I consent to lose the pleasure of your company, through any disagreeable argument—at least, till we have talked over happier topics.'

The lady smiled, courteseyed, and gave her hand to the Marquis, who led her towards the diningroom. Here they were joined by Bucklaw, Craigengelt and others. Lucy did not appear; her mother begging the Marquis to excuse her, as she was slightly unwell.

XXI

Meanwhile the Master of Ravenswood rode away from his fathers' house, with his mind full of mingled anger and regret. The terms of Lady Ashton's letter made it impossible for him, without lack of that pride of which he had too much, to stay an instant longer. The Marquis, even though he had shared the insult, still hoped to heal the quarrel; but he had made his kinsman promise to wait for him at the small inn, halfway between the Castle and Wolf's Crag, where he would join him later.

At first he rode quickly; but as the path grew wilder, slackened his pace while he thought over what had occurred. This path led towards the

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Mermaid's Well, and the cottage of Alice; and he recalled the fatal influence which the well was said to have over the Ravenswoods, and the advice which old Alice had vainly given him. 'What she foretold has happened,' he thought. 'Or rather, worse. I am not even the ally of my father's enemy, but have been disdained by him.

And now a strange thing happened, whose story, false or true, has been handed down by Scottish superstition. As the Master neared the well, they say, his horse stopped suddenly, reared up, and refused to go forward, as though some terror faced it. Looking towards the well, Ravenswood made out a female figure dressed in white, on the very spot where Lucy had sat when he told his love. His first thought was that she had known what way he would ride, and had come here to say farewell; so he jumped down and hastened towards the well on foot, crying softly, 'Miss Ashton—Lucy!'

The figure turned, and showed the face not of Lucy, but of old blind Alice. Her dress was like a shroud, and her height greater, as he thought, than it had usually seemed. As he approached she rose slowly, motioned him to come no nearer, and moved her lips without sound. He stopped; and when he again advanced, the figure glided backwards and vanished; nor was there any pressure on the grass, to make him suppose that anyone had stood there. He returned to his horse, which he found sweating and terrified, and rode on towards Alice's cottage to find if she was there. But her seat outside was empty, and as he drew near he heard a girl sobbing within. He lifted

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the latch and entered; and there on her miserable pallet, lay the old servant of the Ravenswoods, dead.

The little girl who had lived with her was at first more frightened than consoled by his sudden entry. But she told him, presently, that he had come too late; and when he asked her meaning, the child explained that old Alice had sent a messenger to the castle, that she might see him before her death. She had died on the stroke of one; and he now remembered, trembling, that that hour had sounded from a distant church-clock just before he had seen the white figure, which he now knew to have been her ghost.

He sent the child for help, promising to stay by Alice till the old women came, who were used to laying out the dead. But before long these appeared—in haste, since this sad duty was one in which they took a strange and gloomy delight. He gave them money, asked where he could find the sexton, and left the place. But while tightening the girths of his horse's saddle, he could not help overhearing the talk of two of them, who had come out into the garden to gather herbs for their task. 'The Master is generous,' one old hag said, 'and handsome—he would make a pretty corpse. I would like to have the laying-out of him!'

'It is written on his brow,' returned the other, who was said to be a witch, 'that no one will ever lay him out.'

'Will he die in battle, then, like so many of his fathers?'

'He will not be so fortunate,' the old witch replied. 'But ask no more questions. I was told his fate, by those who read his fortune at birth.'

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The Master rode away. He despised those beliefs in witchcraft, which his countrymen held. But the vision which he had seen that day, whether real or not, filled him with superstitious fears which he could not shake off. Nor was the business, which he had to do at the inn, of a sort to raise his spirits. Old Alice had asked that she might be buried in the Hermitage, a little lonely graveyard where lay some of the Ravenswoods, and many of their retainers. The spot was deserted now, and the tombstones of the ancient warriors overthrown. The sexton's cottage was close by—a place so low, and its thatch so covered with grass, that it was like a grave itself. Ravenswood found that the man was away at a wedding; for he was fiddler as well as gravedigger. So he left word that he would call next day, and retired to the inn.

Soon after, a servant of the Marquis brought a message that his master would join Ravenswood at the inn next morning. And so the Master, instead of going on to Wolf's Crag, stayed there to await his kinsman.

XXII

He had little sleep that night, and ghastly dreams with it; so he rose early, and made his way to the lonely graveyard. The old sexton was busy already in a half-dug grave; and as the Master stood silent, addressed him.

'You are a wedding customer, sir, no doubt?'

'What makes you think so, friend?'

'I live by two trades, sir—fiddle and spade; filling the world, and emptying it; so in thirty years I have learned to know both kinds of customers.'

'Yet you are wrong today,' said Ravenswood.

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'Am I?' said the sexton, looking keenly at him.

'It may be so! For, young as your face is, there is something in it today as near death as marriage.'

'I want you to look after the decent burial of an old woman, Alice Gray—she died yesterday, and is to lie beside her husband, if you know his grave.'

'I know every grave here,' the old man answered. 'But who is to pay for her?'

'There is the money, my friend,' said Ravenswood.

'You are one of her English relations, I suppose?' the sexton asked. 'I have heard she married below her rank. It was right to let her face her own troubles while she lived; and it is right to give her decent burial now: for that brings credit to yourself, rather than to her.' And then he pointed to a grave. 'That is Albert Grays—the third grave beyond the great stone that lies above some of the Ravenswoods. There are many of their kin here—may the devil take them!'

'You have no love for the Ravenswoods, then?' asked the Master, not very pleased.

'Why should I? When they had land and power, they used it ill. And now their head is down, few care how long they may be in lifting it.'

'I have never heard,' said Ravenswood, 'that this unhappy family deserved such ill-will.'

The old man shook his head. 'I have seen three generations of them, each as bad as another—' And with that he began a long tale, how he had been the trumpeter of the old Lord Ravenswood (who was the Master's grandfather), and had followed him to the wars, and fought at Bothwell Bridge in 1679.

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'There was old Ravenswood at the head, with his sword; and Caleb Balderstone, who is living yet; and young Allan Ravenswood, pistol in hand, crying to me 'Sound the trumpet, you villain, or I will blow your brains out!' And then he told how they had crossed the ford, and how he was all but slain by one of the enemy, when the old Lord saved his life.

'So you were rather obliged to the old lord, I think' said Ravenswood.

'Was I! First for bringing me into danger, against my will. And then for throwing a man on top of me, that burst the very breath out of my body! I have been short of breath ever since, and cannot go twenty yards without panting.'

'So you lost your place as trumpeter?'

'To be sure I did! I could not blow at all. But I still had my wage and a free house, and might have done well enough but for Allan, the last Lord Ravenswood, who was far worse than his father—'

'What!' cried the Master in surprise. 'Did this last Lord Ravenswood take from you what his father had allowed?'

'He did. For he mismanaged his affairs, and let in this Sir William Ashton on us, that will give nothing for nothing, and has turned me away.'

'If lord Ravenswood protected his people while he had means of doing so, they should remember him kindly' the Master said.

'You are welcome to your own opinion, sir. But you will not persuade me that he did his duty, either to himself or to us, in bringing his affairs to such ruin.'

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'It is too true,' thought Ravenswood. 'A man's folly may cause many others to suffer, beside himself!'

'However,' said the sexton, 'this young man Edgar is likely to avenge my wrongs on the whole of his kindred.'

'How?'

'They say he is going to marry Lady Ashton's daughter. And if Lady Ashton once lays hold of him, you will see she will make him suffer sorely! So the worst wish that I shall wish the lad is, that he may go his own way, and join his father's enemies, who have taken his estate and my little garden from their lawful owners!'

At this, the Master strode away, knowing well that people both high and low would think of his engagement with Lucy like this ignorant and selfish peasant. 'And I have stooped to be so despised, and am none the less rejected,' he thought bitterly. 'Oh Lucy, your faith must be true indeed, to atone for the dishonour which men's thoughts, and your mother's conduct, have laid on the heir of Ravenswood!'

And now he saw the Marquis, who had arrived at the inn, and had walked forth to find his kinsman. The Marquis made some apology for not coming sooner, since he had been given certain news which had made him delay. 'I find,' he said, 'that there has been a love affair here. And though I might blame you for not having written to me, as being the head of your family—'

'With your lordship's leave,' said Ravenswood, 'I am deeply grateful for your interest—but I am the head of my family.'

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'I know, I know,' the Marquis said. 'In a strict heraldic sense, you certainly are so. What I mean is—'

The Master interrupted him hotly; and the two might have quarrelled at once, had not the sexton come up to them to ask if they would care to hear his music at the inn.

'We want no music,' said the Master curtly.

'Your honour does not know what you are refusing, then,' said the fiddler impudently. 'And he began to give a list of some of the tunes he could play.'

'Take yourself off,' the Marquis said. 'You interrupt our talk.'

But the fiddler went on in a lower tone, that if the gentlemen happened to be 'honest' (Jacobites, he meant), he could play some of the old Stuart tunes, which were now forbidden by law.

The Marquis, who was sometimes thought to favour the Jacobites, could not help laughing as he threw the fellow a coin, telling him to play to the servants if he liked, and leave them in peace.

'Well, gentlemen,' said the sexton, 'I will wish you good-day. I am the better for your money, and you will be the worse for missing my music, I tell you. But I'll go home for my fiddle, and so to your folk, to see if they have better ears than their masters!'

XXIII

'I wished to tell you, my good kinsman' said the Marquis, 'that I have tried to discuss this love-affair of yours. I never saw the young lady till yesterday. So knowing nothing of her, I pay you a compliment, and her no offence, in saying you might choose better.'

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'My lord, I am grateful,' Ravenswood said. I did not mean to trouble you with this matter. But since you know of it, you must believe that I had weighed and overcome the objections to such a match, before going so far with it.'

'I did not doubt it,' said the Marquis. 'And I have tried, so far as it became our dignity, to win the Lord Keeper's consent. I pointed out the honour they would gain, by marrying their daughter into so noble a house. I reminded them how closely we are related, how complete a change is likely soon to be made in politics, and how deeply interested I am in your future.'

'And with what result?' asked Ravenswood, uncertain whether to thank his kinsman's interference or to resent it.

'Why, the Lord Keeper would have listened to reason,' said the Marquis. 'He does not want to lose his post; he likes yourself; and he sees how such a match would help him. But his lady—'

'What of her?' the Master asked. 'Let me know—I can bear it.'

'I am ashamed to tell you half of what she said,' replied the Marquis. 'Her mind is made up—why, I cannot guess. She could find no more honourable match. As for money, that used to be her husband's business rather than hers. I think she hates you for having the rank which he has not, and perhaps for not having the lands which he has. I shall say no more; though I should like to hear that you gave up all thought of so unfortunate a match.'

'That must be my affair, my lord. But I have no engagement with her parents, and what I do shall be

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ruled by her. If she continues to prefer me in my poverty to wealthier suitors—well! If she should change her mind, I trust my friends will be silent on my disappointment, and I shall know how to make my enemies so.'

'Well said!' the Marquis cried. 'For my part, I like you enough to wish the affair ended. This Sir William Ashton was a clever enough small lawyer twenty years ago; but his most useful work is done. No government will take him at his own valuation—or rather at his wife's. And a connection with him could not bring you anything, save such part of your father's lands as he might disgorge as dowry. Believe me, you will gain more than that by taking your dispute to the English Parliament; and I can help you there, and make him rue the day he repulsed you.'

Ravenswood suspected, that his kinsman had better reasons than their relationship for befriending him thus. But he said only, that his engagement was with Miss Ashton personally; that he desired no benefits from her father; and that nothing should make him give her up except her own wish. After which he declined to discuss the matter further.

The Marquis soon had other news for him. Letters had followed him from Edinburgh, announcing that his political plans were even now about to be crowned with success. And they sat over dinner so long in talk of this, that they delayed their journey two hours later than they had intended.

'But what of that?' the Marquis said. 'Your castle of Wolf's Crag is but five miles away—'

Ravenswood protested that Wolf's Crag could offer no fitting hospitality to such a guest. 'Should you

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appear so unexpectedly, I fear my old servant would hang himself! For we are quite unprovided.'

The Marquis however insisted that he would be well content at Wolf's Crag; and urged his request with such goodnature, that at last Ravenswood consented for a servant to be sent forward to warn Caleb Balderstone. Soon after, they set out themselves; the Marquis explaining on the way what plans he had made for Ravenswood's preferment. He was to be entrusted with a secret mission abroad; which since it required a messenger of rank, talent and trust, would bring him both profit and honour. 'But your castle deserves a better report than you have given it,' said the Marquis presently.

'For I see a great light shining from it, as if no ordinary welcome were being prepared for us!'

The Master saw it too. And as he wondered, Caleb's voice was heard outside the coach, in grief and fear. 'Alas, gentlemen! Alas, keep to the right! Wolf's Crag is burning—all the wealth of it, the pictures, the tapestries, and all its splendour! Keep towards the village, I beg you! You will find lodging ready there··· but alas for this night, and for me, that live to see it!'

Ravenswood was at first stunned by this new disaster. Then he sprang from the coach, while the Marquis bade his servants ride full speed to help put out the fire. But old Caleb cried louder still—'Stop, sirs! Turn back, for your lives! Thirty barrels of gunpowder are in the cellars, and the fire cannot be far from them! To the right, I say! Put the hill between us and the danger···'

The whole party hastened to obey, dragging Ravenswood with them. But the Master caught hold

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of Caleb roughly. 'Gunpowder!' he cried. 'What gunpowder? How powder could be there without my knowledge, I cannot understand.'

'But I can' said the Marquis; and added in a whisper, 'I understand it well. Ask him no more questions.'

'One only,' cried Ravenswood. 'What has become of poor Maisie?'

'She is well and safe,' Caleb replied. 'I saw her out of the castle before I left it.'

Hearing this, the Master at last consented to be dragged away to the village; where not only the inn, but the house of Mr. Girder the cooper welcomed them with a liberality, which needs some explanation.

The Lord Keeper had not failed to learn the truth about his dinner at Wolf's Crag, and Caleb's manner of getting it. In amusement, and wishing to please Ravenswood, he had sent up the cooper's name to Edinburgh; and by this time Mr. Girder had been given the vacant post. At once the dignity of old Caleb, not only in Mr. Girder's eyes but throughout the village, was restored to all its former glory. He found himself entertained to a solemn feast; at which he told such tales of what he could do with his master, his master with the Lord Keeper, and the Lord Keeper with the Privy Council, that before the company broke up, each guest felt sure of climbing to any height if Caleb would speak for him. That night the cunning old man regained all the influence, which he had held in the great days of the Ravenswoods, and even increased it; which filled him not only with satisfaction, but with much secret amusement.

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XXIV

Hence it was, that the village of Wolf's Hope had been so eager to welcome the Master of Ravenswood and his noble guest. Hence too, that as soon as fire was seen to break out at Wolf's Crag, the whole village had run to offer their help to Caleb. He would not let them come near the castle, however, driving them away by warning them of the gunpowder; and their zeal had turned into another direction. Never had the village seen such a killing of geese and chickens, such a cooking of hams and cakes, as was now made to entertain the visitors. All the poorer houses were made ready for the Marquis's servants; but Caleb Balderstone decreed that the honour of entertaining the Marquis and Ravenswood should fall to the Cooper himself. The guests were received by him and his family with the utmost joy; and as his house was large, a room was found for each of the visitors to rest in, while dinner was prepared.

But no sooner was Ravenswood alone than he slipped away, and climbed the hill between the village and Wolf's Crag to watch the fate of his castle. Some village-boys were there already; and Ravenswood felt full of bitterness, that the sons of his father's people should regard the blowing-up of Wolf's Crag as no more than a holiday-show. But as he reached the top he saw, to his surprise, that the fire was almost out. He turned, and found Caleb following him.

'The place cannot have blown up,' he cried. 'If it had, the noise would have been heard for twenty miles!'

'Very likely it would,' said Caleb calmly.

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'Then the fire did not reach the cellars?'

'It seems not.'

'This is beyond my patience, Caleb,' the Master said. 'I must go and see for myself.'

'Your honour must do no such thing,' replied Caleb firmly.

'For I can tell you all about the castle here, as well as if we were in it. Only take care, lest you betray yourself to the boys, or to the Marquis when you go back.'

'Speak out, you old fool,' cried Ravenswood. 'Let me know the best and worst at once.'

'The best and worst is, that the tower is standing, as safe and empty as ever.'

'But the fire—?'

'There was no fire at all, except some fern and straw that I lit in the yard, after sending back the Marquis's servant.'

The Master hardly knew whether to laugh or be angry, as he learned how his faithful servant had pretended to fire Wolf's Crag, lest the Marquis and his servant should discover its poverty. 'But the powder?' he cried at last. 'Is there any there? The Marquis seemed to know of it.'

Old Caleb laughed outright. 'The Marquis knew truly!' he cried; and added in a lower tone—'Long ago when a revolt was planned in Scotland, the Marquis and all the great lords of the north were mixed up in it; and at that time many a good sword and gun were shipped secretly from France, and the powder with them. Great trouble we had, to get them into the castle by night! For not every one could be trusted with such dangerous work.'

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'And these boys,' asked Ravenswood, 'are they to wait all night for the blowing-up of a tower that is not even on fire?'

'Not if your honour wishes them to go home. Though it would do them no harm to wait—' And old Caleb, going towards the boys, told them that their Honours Lord Ravenswood and the Marquis of A— had given orders that the tower was not to blow up till next day.

'Then the fire is out?' they cried.

'To be sure!' said Caleb sternly. 'Do you think the castle of so great a lord as Lord Ravenswood would go on blazing, while he himself stood by?' And he added to Ravenswood, when the boys had gone, 'It is always right to train up children to respect their betters!'

'But you never told me what became of the powder,' the Master said.

'Why, the revolt did not take place. And so I changed the powder for gin and brandy, little by little, with the captains of Dutch and French boats. It lasted many a year; and I kept a little for your own hunting. And now, sir, have I not done better to find you a supper in the village, than in your own old ruin?'

Ravenswood could not be angry any longer. 'But you ought to have told me, Caleb,' said he.

'No, no! An old servant may tell a lie for the family's honour, which would not become you! And besides, young people cannot make the most of such a tale. Now, this fire will answer questions, which have been costing me twenty lies a day—and no one believing them, either! It will save the family honour for a score of years. 'Where are the family pictures?'

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asks some curious person. 'Burnt in the fire!' I'll say. 'Where's the family Silver?' 'The great fire—!' 'Where are the clothes, the tapestries and decorations, beds and needlework?' 'The fire, the fire, the fire—!' For indeed such things wear out, and are consumed by time; but a good lie lasts for ever!'

Ravenswood knew old Galeb's stubborn spirit too well, to argue further. So he returned to the village, and said only that the fire had burnt itself out without reaching the powder. After which they all sat down to an excellent meal.

That night they all slept in far more comfort and luxury than they could have enjoyed at Wolf's Crag. For the Cooper and his family spared no pains to entertain them; nor were they allowed to start upon their journey next day, without a breakfast as rich and various as the supper had been. The Marquis took care to pay the villagers liberally; he also left a gold piece with the cooper to be shared by his own house-servants; Mr. Girder's pride would not allow him to spend any of this on himself, but he assured his folk that he would think them ungrateful, if they bought brandy anywhere but from his own store; so it is likely that the Marquis's gift found its way at last into the Cooper's own pocket.

Before leaving, Ravenswood told Caleb (to the old man's great joy) of the change which was about to take place in his fortunes; and since he soon would have money in plenty, he gave Caleb most of what now remained to him, bidding him cease from levying any more toll on the people of Wolf's Hope. The old servant agreed, more readily than his master had expected. 'It would be a shame, and little credit,'

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said he, 'to tax the poor creatures so, now that the family are able to live honourably on their own means. And it might be wise,' he added, 'to give them a short rest; so that they may pay out more readily, if your honour needs anything in future.'

XXV

The travellers now came safely to Edinburgh, where the Master lodged with his noble kinsman. Meanwhile the expected change in politics took place, and the Tory party (which the Marquis led) gained the upper hand both in Scotland and England. In Scotland, at any rate, the return of Tory power brought fresh hopes to the Jacobites; and men who had suffered in the Jacobite cause looked forward eagerly, not only to making good their losses, but to avenging themselves on their defeated enemies; while the Whigs had little hope of escaping the same kind of hardships, which they had endured in the days of Charles and James the Second.

But the men who felt most fear were those, who had sought only at all times to serve whatever party was uppermost. These began to profess their friendship for the Marquis of A—; and as they could see how much he favoured the Master of Ravenswood, they were the first to suggest that the lost lands of the Master should be restored. The Marquis took them at their word; nor was it long before young Ravenswood found a good deal of his former property returning to him. Sir William Ashton, particularly was threatened with an appeal to the English House of Lords; but for Lucy's sake, as well as for the hospitality which Sir William had shown him, the Master resolved to be generous. He wrote to the late Lord

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Keeper (for he no longer held that office) stating frankly the engagement between himself and Miss Ashton, asking his leave for them to marry, and promising that he was willing to settle all affairs in a way favourable to Sir William himself.

He wrote also to Lady Ashton, regretting any offence which he had unwillingly given her, professing his love for Lucy, and appealing to Lady Ashton, as a noblewoman, to forget generously the old quarrel between their families, and to believe him her friend. A third letter he sent to Lucy, secretly; assuring her of his continued love and of his brighter fortunes. He had done his best, he said, to win her parents' consent; perhaps his absence on his honourable mission abroad might give time for their enmity to die down; but if not, he hoped and trusted that she would not let her loyalty to him be shaken. To these three letters, he received very different answers.

Lady Ashton replied at once:—

Sir, unknown,—

I have received a letter signed Edgar, Master of Ravenswood: uncertain from whom it comes, since the honours of Ravenswood were taken away from Allan, late Lord Ravenswood, on account of his high treason. If you are the writer, you must understand that I claim a parent's power over Miss Lucy Ashton, whom I am marrying to a worthy person. Nor would I listen, in any case, to a proposal from you, nor from any of your house, since they have been the enemies of both State and Church. My opinion in this affair cannot be changed by any passing prosperity of yours. Wishing you to understand this for your own sake, so far as it concerns you, I pray you to take no further notice of her, who desires to remain your unknown servant.

MARGARET ASHTON.

Two days after he received this very unpleasing letter, the Master was approached in Edinburgh by a

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man whom he recognised as the servant of Sir William Ashton. The man bowed, slipped a letter into his hand, and disappeared. It contained four large and closely-written sheets; but, as often is the case with a lawyer's words, it told the Master little, except that the writer found himself in great difficulty.

Sir William enlarged upon his regard for his dear young friend, the Master of Ravenswood, and upon his very extreme regard for his dear old friend, the Marquis of A—. He hoped that they would act with due respect for the sacred decrees of law. He spoke much of generosity and forgiveness, and hinted how liable were human affairs to change. He regretted, and gently blamed, the haste with which his office of Lord keeper had been taken from him, in spite of all his experience and goodwill to the party in power. Of the engagement between Lucy and Ravenswood, he spoke in a confused manner, regretting that the affair had gone so far, and reminding the Master that he had never encouraged it. He pointed out that as his daughter was not yet of age, she could not marry without her parents' consent; and that the young people's haste had had, on Lady Ashton's mind, a bad effect which he could not at present remove. Her son, Colonel Douglas Ashton, supported her; nor could Sir William differ from them without a family quarrel, which would be hard to heal, and which was not to be thought of. In a postscript he hinted that, rather than let the Scottish law be upset by an appeal to Parliament, he himself would privately consent to sacrifice some part of the Ravenswood lands.

From Lucy, by some unknown means, he received the following lines:—

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I received yours, but at great risk; do not try to write again till times are better. I am sorely troubled, but I will be true to my word, while my reason remains to me. That you are happy and prosperous is some comfort, and my state needs it all.

L. A.

This letter filled Ravenswood with the greatest alarm. He tried many times, in spite of her warning, to send letters to Miss Ashton, and even to see her himself. But his plans were vain, and he had only the grief of finding that they had been successfully prevented from writing to each other. This distressed him the more, since he was bound to leave Scotland upon the important mission which had been confided to him. Before going, he showed Sir William's letter to the Marquis, who observed with a smile that the late Lord Keeper's chance was past, and that he had now to learn which party was in power. And Ravenswood had much difficulty to persuade the Marquis to promise, that if Sir William would allow the marriage between himself and Lucy, the appeal to the House of Lords should not be made.

'I would hardly consent,' the Marquis said, 'to your throwing away your birthright in this manner, were I not sure that Lady Ashton will keep her word, and that her husband dares not oppose her.'

'But yet,' said the Master, 'I trust your lordship will hold my engagement sacred?'

'Believe me,' the Marquis said, 'I would be a friend even to your follies. And having thus told You *my* opinion, I will try, as I see my chance, to act for you according to your own.'

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The Master of Ravenswood could but thank his generous kinsman, and leave him full power to act in all his affairs. He then left Scotland upon his mission, which seemed likely to keep him abroad for some months.

XXVI

But a year passed. And although the Master had been expected long ago, he was still abroad on his mission ; or, as some people said, on another and more personal matter. Meanwhile certain events had happened in the Ashton family, as may be learnt from the following talk, which took place between Bucklaw and Craigengelt at Girnington.

They were seated in comfort in the hall of Bucklaw's new home, with a jug of wine between them. Yet Bucklaw was silent and gloomy, and the other was at his wits' end to know how to cheer him. 'Never' cried he, 'did I see a man look less like a bridegroom ! I vow you have more the look of one about to be hanged ! '

'Thank you,' said Bucklaw. 'But I suppose you have your own most likely fate in mind. And pray, captain, why should I look merry, when I am far from feeling so ? '

'And yet this match,--the best in the whole country, and once so desired by you,—is about to be settled ; and you are as sulky as a bear that has lost her cubs.'

'I do not know that I should marry at all,' said Bucklaw, 'if I were not too far forward to leap back.'

'Leap back ! ' the Captain cried. 'Is not Miss Ashton's dowry richer than any in the district ? '

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'I care not if it is. I have enough already.'

'And the mother, who loves you like her now child?'

'Better than some of her children, I believe. Or there would be little love lost in the matter.'

'And Colonel Sholto Douglas Ashton, who desires the marriage above all earthly things?'

'Because,' said Bucklaw, 'he expects to become a Member of Parliament with my help.'

'And the father, who is as keen to see the match made, as ever I have been to win a cock-fight?'

'Ay' replied Bucklaw in the same gloomy tone, 'it is part of Sir William's policy to make sure of the next best match, since he cannot sell his child to save the Ravenswood estate, which the English House of Lords are about to tear from him.'

'And what of the young lady herself,' asked Craigengelt; 'the finest young woman in all Scotland, of whom you used to be so fond when she refused you? Now that she consents, and gives up her engagement with Ravenswood, you are hanging back. I fear you do not know your own mind!'

'I'll tell you it, in a word' answered Bucklaw, getting up and walking about the room. 'I want to know the cause of Miss Ashton's changing her mind so suddenly.'

'What need you care, since the change favours you?'

'Because,' said Bucklaw, 'though I know little about such fine ladies, I believe Miss Ashton's change

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is far too sudden to be a mere whim of her own. I'll be bound, Lady Ashton understands every means of breaking the human mind; and I dare say there are as many, as there are kinds of bits and bridles for young horses.'

'If it were not so, how should we ever train them at all?'

Bucklaw stopped walking, and leaned upon the back of a chair. 'And besides,' he said, 'Ravenswood is still in the way. Do you think he'll give up Lucy's engagement?'

'Why not?' the captain asked. 'Since he wishes to marry another woman, and she another man?'

'And do you really believe that he is going to marry the foreign lady we heard of?'

'You heard yourself,' answered Craigengelt, 'what Captain Westenho said about it, and the merry wedding that is being prepared.'

'Captain Westenho,' replied Bucklaw, 'is rather too much like yourself to be a trusty witness. He drinks deep, gambles and swears, and I suspect can lie and cheat a little too. In their place, these are useful qualities; but they are too much the qualities of a rogue, to be taken for evidence.'

'Well then,' said Craigengelt, 'will you believe Colonel Douglas Ashton, who overheard the Marquis of A—to say, that his kinsman had done better for himself than to give his father's land for the pale-cheeked daughter of a broken fanatic, and that Bucklaw was welcome to wear Ravenswood's old shoes?'

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'Did he say so, by heaven?' cried Bucklaw, in one of his fits of reckless anger. 'If I had heard him, I would have torn the tongue from his throat before all his servants, and his Highland bullies too! Why did not Ashton run him through the body?'

'How do I know?' said the Captain. 'He deserved it, sure enough. But he is an old man and a Privy Councillor, and there would be more risk than credit in meddling with him. You had better think of consoling Miss Ashton for the disgrace that is likely to fall on her, than meddle with a man too old to fight, and too highly-placed for you to reach him.'

'I shall reach him, though, one day,' said Bucklaw, 'and his kinsman Ravenswood too! Meanwhile, I'll take care that Miss Ashton does not suffer from the insult which they have paid her. But it's an awkward task, and I wish it were ended; I hardly know how to talk to her,—but fill a bow, Captain, and we will drink her health. It grows late; and a night-cap of good wine is worth all the thought in Europe!'

XXVII

Bucklaw and Craigengelt were early at the Castle next day. Lucy's parents and Colonel Ashton welcomed them. And after some stammering and blushing (for he was shy of decent society, however bold elsewhere) Bucklaw explained his wish to be allowed to speak with Lucy about their coming marriage.

'Lucy will wait upon you at once,' Lady Ashton smiled. 'But as she is very young, and has lately been led into an engagement of which she is now ashamed, I hope you will respect her wish that I should be present too?'

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Bucklaw wished nothing better than this; for he was so unused to such affairs that he feared to make some stupid blunder. So, though he knew how strong was Lady Ashton's influence over her daughter, he forgot all about this, and lost his chance of finding for himself what Lucy really felt.

He was soon alone with Lucy and her mother, who retired to the far end of the room. Lucy herself seemed calm; but whether from lack of interest or from despair, Bucklaw was too nervous to Judge. He began at once, with many clumsy oaths which he was too upset to check, to stammer out a confused address. Lucy sat silent, not even looking at him; till at last her mother, in voice which though soft had yet a hint of command, said 'Lucy, my dear, have you heard what Bucklaw has been saying?'

The girl started, and said hastily—'Yes, madam—no, my lady—I beg pardon, I did not hear.'

'You need not fear, my love' said Lady Ashton, coming forward. 'You have long agreed to give Mr. Hayston a kind answer, knowing well how much your father and I desire it.' A show of motherly love hid the sternness of these words—a show which deceived Bucklaw easily enough, though Lucy herself well knew her mother's meaning. The girl sat upright, looked round with a glance in which fear and a still wilder expression were mixed, but remained silent. Bucklaw then resumed—

'I believe I have been a fool, Miss Ashton; I have tried to speak to you as, they say, young ladies like; and I dont think you understood my meaning—and no wonder, for I'll be hanged if I understood it myself! But in plain Scotch, your father and mother are

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content; and if you can take a plain young fellow for your husband, that will never cross your wishes, I will make you mistress of the best place in this district; you shall have Lady Girnington's town-house in Edinburgh, and live as you please. Only, I must keep a corner of our table for a worthless old friend of mine, whose company I could well spare, if it were not that the fellow has persuaded me that I can't do without him—'

'Now, for shame, Bucklaw!' interrupted Lady Ashton again. 'How can you think that Lucy can object to that honest, goodnatured creature, Captain Craigengelt?'

'Why, madam, as for his honesty and goodnature, I think they are pretty much on a level. But the fellow knows my ways, and is useful to me···Yet all this does not matter; for since I have taken courage to ask a plain question, I would fain hear Miss Ashton herself give me a plain answer.'

'My dear Bucklaw,' said Lady Ashton, 'since Lucy is shy, let me say for her that she has already consented to be guided by her father and me in this. Lucy, my love,' she added, with that same mixture of command and kindness, 'my dearest love, speak for yourself. Is it not as I say?'

Lucy answered, in a low trembling tone, 'I have promised to obey—but on one condition.'

'She means,' said Lady Ashton, 'that she awaits an answer to the message which she has sent to this man at Vienna, or Ratisbon, or Paris, or wherever he is, asking him to give up the engagement into which he persuaded her. I am sure you will not think it

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wrong that she should be careful of this; indeed, it concerns us all.'

'Quite right,' Bucklaw agreed. 'But I thought you might have had an answer six times over. I have a mind to go and fetch one myself, if Miss Ashton will bid me.'

'By no means,' said Lady Ashton, 'We have had much trouble to dissuade Douglas, whose duty it might be, from so rash a journey; and shall we let you, almost equally dear to us, go to a desperate man on an errand so desperate? Beyond doubt, as this unworthy person has sent no answer to her letter, we can take his silence for Consent, and suppose the engagement ended. Sir William, who should know best, is sure of this; and so, dear Lucy—'

'Madam,' said Lucy with unusual strength, 'urge me no more. If this unhappy engagement is broken, you can do what you will with me. Till then, my consent would be a heavy sin.'

'But my love, if he refuses to write—'

'He will not' Lucy answered. 'Six weeks ago, I sent him a copy of my first letter by a sure messenger.'

'You have not—you could not—you durst not!' cried Lady Ashton, in a voice very different from the gentleness which she had pretended before. But at once correcting herself, she went on as sweetly as ever, 'My dearest Lucy, how could you think of such a thing?'

'No matter,' said Bucklaw. 'I respect Miss Ashton's feelings, and only wish that I had been her messenger.'

'And how long,' asked her mother scornfully, 'are we to wait for your messenger, since ours could not be trusted?'

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'I have counted weeks, days, hours and minutes,' Lucy said. 'In another week I shall have an answer, unless he is dead. Till then, sir,' she added to Bucklaw, 'do me the kindness to beg my mother not to demand my consent.'

'I will,' cried Bucklaw. 'And although more eager than ever to win it, I would renounce it rather than cause you a moment's pain.'

Lady Ashton, though still furious that Lucy should have written secretly, could not but agree. So she resumed her tender tone, and said, 'In eight days then, my dearest love, we shall hope for your answer.'

'Miss Ashton must not be hurried, madam,' said Bucklaw, who though blunt was goodnatured enough. 'Sometimes a messenger may be delayed by some accident. The twentieth day from this is St. Jude's. I shall wait till then. Meanwhile, as I shall not expect an answer from Miss Ashton myself, I hope that your ladyship and Sir William and Colonel Douglas will allow her every chance to make up her mind.'

'Sir,' said Miss Ashton, 'you are generous.'

'As for that,' answered Bucklaw 'I am only a plain good-humoured young fellow, as I said before, who will gladly make you happy if you will allow him, and show him how to do so.'

Having said this, he saluted her with more emotion than usual, and took his leave. Lady Ashton left the room with him, assuring him that Lucy valued his love and asking him to see Sir William before he went. 'Since' she added, with a keen glance back at Lucy, 'by St. Jude's Day, we must all be ready to sign and seal!'

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'To sign and seal,' sighed Lucy as the door closed. 'To do and die—!' And clasping her thin hands together, she leaned back faintly in her chair.

But soon young Henry burst in, shouting a request that she would give him some silver wire, to fasten bells upon the straps which tethered his hawk's legs. 'And yet the bird is not worth them,' he complained. 'For after all the trouble we had to get her, she is turning out ill. For she just wounds the partridge, and then lets it go! And what good can the poor bird do after that, except die in the first bush that she can crawl into?'

'You are right, Henry' said Lucy sadly, holding the boy by the hand. 'But there are others beside your hawk who only wound their prey; and other wounded birds, who seek but to die in quiet, and can find no bush to hide their heads in!'

'Ah, that's some speech out of your story-books,' said the boy. 'And Sholto says they have turned your head!'

XXVIII

It may seem strange that Bucklaw, while paying court to Lucy Ashton, should let his judgment be ruled by her mother. But in those days in Scotland, as in France until the revolution, young women of rank were subject to a very strict discipline. Until marriage, they lived mainly at home, in the charge of their parents, who were too apt to settle the future of their children without regard to the latter's wishes. A suitor, then, expected little more from his bride than consent to her parents' will; and as he had no chance to get to know her, was forced to choose blindly, as the lovers in Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*

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had to choose a casket. So Bucklaw took his bride on trust, as readily as many a more thoughtful gentleman might have done; knowing only that her parents and friends had good reason to favour him.

For indeed, since Ravenswood had gone, the Marquis of A—had acted for him in such a way, as to make a marriage with Lucy almost impossible. Like many misguided friends, he did what he thought was best for Ravenswood, rather than what Ravenswood himself would have wished. With all his power as Privy Councillor, he urged forward Ravenswood's appeal against Sir William Ashton in the English House of Lords. And as such an appeal was a new thing in Scotland, it was opposed most bitterly by many of the other party, as an interference with the country's law. Sir William himself, as grasping as he was timid, was brought to despair by it; his son's prouder spirit raged, since he must now lose his father's estate; Lady Ashton had no thought but for revenge; and even Lucy, swayed by the talk of those around her, could not help feeling that her lover was acting hastily and even unkindly. 'My father welcomed him,' she sighed, 'and allowed the friendship between us. Should he not have remembered this? In his place, I should have given up twice the value of such lands, which he seeks with an ardour which shows he has forgotten how deeply I am concerned in this affair!'

Yet Lucy could only murmur these thoughts to herself, unwilling to increase the anger of those around her against the Master of Ravenswood. For their part, they did all they could to persuade her to break the engagement, as being no better than a shameful and wicked encouragement of her own people's enemy.

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But Lucy's spirit was high. And although she stood alone, she might have withstood her father's bitter complaints, the taunts or even violence of her brother Colonel Douglas Ashton, and the interference of her other relations and friends. But it was beyond her power to resist or escape the constant persecution of Lady Ashton, who applied all her powerful will to break her daughter's engagement, and to separate the lovers for ever by Lucy's marriage with Bucklaw. Far better than her husband, she knew men's hearts, and saw that in this way she might revenge herself on her enemy; nor did she care though to hurt him she must wound her own daughter's heart. With this stern purpose, she took every means of probing Lucy's mind, and thought out every device by which a human will can be wrenched from its settled resolve. By gold and by her own power, she obtained such command of all who were placed round her daughter, that no besieged fortress was ever more completely blockaded; though at the same time, no sign appeared, that Lucy was not entirely free. Every letter, in which Ravenswood told Lucy the reasons which obliged him to remain abroad, and more than one note which poor Lucy had addressed to him (safely, as she thought), fell into the hands of her mother, who burnt them as soon as she had read them. Further, a report reached Scotland from abroad—quite untrue, indeed—which said that the Master was about to marry a foreign lady of birth and fortune; and this lie was caught up eagerly by both political parties.

The Marquis of A—said publicly, not indeed the coarse words which Captain Craigengelt had reported, but others almost as offensive to the Ashtons—namely,

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that he heartily wished that the report might be true; for such a match was far more to be desired, than a marriage with the daughter of an old Whig lawyer whose trickery had ruined the bridegroom's father.

The other party, of course, cried shame upon the Master's treachery, as if he had persuaded the young lady into an engagement, and then left her wilfully and without cause to marry another. Lady Ashton took good care that this opinion was maintained among her relations and friends, for Lucy to hear. Till even Lucy herself at last, who felt that she was suspected, scorned and hated by her own family, began to believe that she had been deserted by the very man, for whose sake she was made to suffer. A soldier named Westenho chanced to arrive from abroad about this time; he was a friend of Craigengelt's; and Craigengelt easily persuaded him, by exaggerating some of the tales and inventing others, to bear witness outright to the truth of the supposed marriage of Ravenswood.

Thus beset on all sides, and reduced to despair, Lucy's will began to weaken under their constant persecution. She became gloomy, lost in her own thoughts, and sometimes even turned fiercely on those who kept troubling her. Her health began to be shaken, and her flushed cheek and wandering eye to show signs of a brain-fever. Most mothers would have pitied her: but Lady Ashton, firm of purpose, watched Lucy's breaking health and mind with no more sympathy, than a soldier watches the towers of a city begin to shake from the assault of his guns; or rather, she thought these disorders of Lucy's mind a sign that her will was weakening; just as a fisherman,

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by the struggles of the fish he has hooked, knows that soon he will be able to land it. And that Lucy's breakdown might be still further hastened, she next began to use a means which well fitted the thoughts and beliefs of those days, but which we should now call hateful and devilish.

XXIX

Lucy's health soon needed some more skilful nurse than the servants of the family. And the nurse chosen by Lady Ashton, for her own strong reasons, was a certain Ailsie Gourlay, sometimes called the Wise Woman of Bowden.

This woman was well known, among the ignorant peasants, for cures which she pretended to make in cases which baffled the regular doctor. She relied partly upon herbs (gathered when she deemed the stars favourable), and partly on signs and charms, which may have persuaded her patients into imagining themselves benefited. These arts she practised openly; but was none the less distrusted by her neighbours, and by the clergy particularly. In secret, she followed a less innocent trade; for in spite of the dreadful punishments inflicted in those days on witches, old hags were yet found willing to take the risk, for the sake of the little money which their witchcraft brought them, and for the fear which it enabled them to inspire in their neighbours. Ailsie Gourlay was not fool enough to confess to a compact with the Devil, however; if she had, she would soon have been burnt alive. She said a harmless fairy helped her, by whose aid she told fortunes, read dreams, and persuaded people to follow her advice as successfully as if the

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Devil himself had aided her, as the whole village believed.

A less powerful woman than Lady Ashton would not have dared to choose Ailsie Gourlay for her daughter's nurse; but her high rank protected her from being accused of dealing in witchcraft, and the witch was brought to the castle. At first Lucy shrank from her, for she was hideous and terrifying; but by degrees her show of kindness gained Lucy's trust, so harshly had the girl been lately treated by others. And then the old hag, sitting alone with Lucy for hours in her bedroom began to speak to her of the legends of the countryside, in which she knew Lucy was already interested. Before long her tales grew more grim and dreadful, such as might have struck terror into a stronger mind than Lucy's now was. At dead of night, she told legends of the Ravenswood family, about whose ill-luck many strange stories had grown. The tale of the Mermaid's Well was repeated by her, as well as the prophecy which Caleb had quoted to Ravenswood about the dead bride, whom the last of his race was to win. And she told also of the ghost which the Master had seen, on that day when he sent for her to prepare old Alice for burial.

Lucy might have despised such tales, had her mind been less unnerved by her sorrow and illness. As it was, they all helped to throw her into a deeper despair. The old woman now led her thoughts towards inquiring into the future, by means of omens, dreams, and trickery of a similar kind; and it is said that Lucy was even shown, in a looking-glass, a vision of a young man whom she took to be Ravenswood, in the act of giving his hand in marriage

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to another lady. Lucy's mind grew wild, her health became daily worse, and her spirit sank still lower. At last her father, partly guessing what was going on, insisted that the old witch should be turned out of the castle. But the harm was already done.

Soon after, Lucy confessed to her parents that she knew that heaven, earth and hell had set themselves against her marriage to Ravenswood; yet her engagement bound her, she persisted, and could never be broken without the Master's consent. 'Let me once know,' she said, 'that he will set me free, and you may do with me as you please. When the jewels are gone, what does the casket matter?' So at last Lady Ashton had to give her leave that a letter should be sent to Ravenswood, asking what he intended. But this letter she wrote herself, wording it in such a way that Lucy seemed to ask for her freedom; even so, Lady Ashton never meant the letter to go, and took good care that the messenger had no chance to deliver it.

Yet after all, a copy of this letter reached Ravenswood. When Sir William drove the old witch from the castle, his wife next called in a very different agent to help her to weaken Lucy's resolve. This was the no other than the Presbyterian clergyman, Mr. Bide-the-Bent, who was won easily to Lady Ashton's side through horror of seeing a Presbyterian girl intend to marry a man of the opposite sect. And yet Lady Ashton was unwise in choosing him. For he was used to think for himself; and when he had talked alone with Lucy, and had seen her grief, he felt bound to admit that she was right in demanding leave to write to Ravenswood, herself, on so solemn

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a matter. Lucy told him then how much she doubted that the former letters had ever reached Ravenswood; and the old man, after long hesitation, agreed with her so far, that he promised to help her to make sure of this.

'I cannot but think, Miss Lucy' he confessed, 'that your good mother, though meaning doubtless to do only what is best for you, has used too much eagerness, and perhaps too little justice to this man, unworthy though he be. I will therefore help you to send one more letter to Edgar Ravenswood, trusting that his answer may set you free from the net in which he has sinfully entangled you. But that nothing further may be written, than your parents have already allowed, I will ask you to write again, without alteration, that letter which your mother has already composed for you. I shall then trust it to so sure a messenger, that if no answer comes, you may know certainly that Ravenswood means in silence to give up his contract.'

Lucy eagerly agreed. A new letter was written in the same words as before, and was given by Mr. Bide-the-Bent to the care of Saunders Moonshine, a member of Mr. Bide-the-Bent's church when on shore, and, when on board his boat, as bold a smuggler as ever traded between France and Scotland. Saunders promised the clergyman that the letter should be safely taken to the Master of Ravenswood at the court where he now was.

This was the letter of which Lucy spoke when (as we have already told) she confessed to her mother that she had written to Ravenswood herself, and begged Bucklaw to grant her time to receive an answer.

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Lucy was now like a sailor who, adrift on a stormy sea, clings for safety to a single plank; while his power of holding it grows every moment more feeble, and while the darkness of the night is lit only by flashes of lightning which reveal the white tops of the waves about to swallow him.

Week crept away after week, and day after day. St. Jude's Day arrived—but there was still no answer.

XXX

St. Jude's Day was the latest date which even Lucy herself had required; and as we have seen, there were neither letters from, nor news of, Ravenswood. But there was news of Bucklaw, and of his trusty comrade Craigengelt, who arrived early in the morning to complete the proposed engagement, and to sign the necessary papers.

These had been carefully prepared, and revised by Sir William himself; for on account of Miss Ashton's health, as it was said, it had been resolved that no one but the people concerned should be present when the parchments were signed. It was also settled that the marriage should take place on the fourth day after signing; a plan formed by Lady Ashton, so that Lucy might have no time to draw back, nor to make further resistance. But indeed, she showed no sign of doing either. She heard what had been arranged with calm despair, or rather with a quietness due to the oppressed and dulled state of her mind. Bucklaw saw in her little more reluctance than one might expect to find in a modest young lady; yet he could not help knowing that she was consenting to the choice of her friends, rather than following any active wish of her own.

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When the bridegroom had greeted them, Miss Ashton was left alone for awhile; but her mother remarked that the papers must be signed before noon, in order that the marriage might be happy. Lucy let herself be dressed in whatever way her servants suggested, and was of course splendidly arrayed. Her dress was of white satin and Brussels lace, and her hair arranged with many jewels, whose brightness made a strange contrast to the deadly paleness of her face, and to the trouble which dwelt in her wild eyes.

She was hardly ready, before Henry appeared, to lead the bride to the great room where all was ready for signing the contract. 'Do you know, sister,' he said, 'I am glad you are to have Bucklaw after all, instead of Ravenswood, who looked like a Spanish grandee coming to cut our throats, and to trample our bodies underfoot. And I am glad the broad seas are between us this day, for I shall never forget how frightened I was, when I thought him to be the picture of old Sir Malise that had walked out of the canvas. Tell me truly, are you not glad to be rid of him?'

'Ask me no questions, dear Henry,' said his unhappy sister. 'Little more can happen to make me either glad or sorry in this world.'

'That is what all young brides say,' said Henry. 'So do not fear, Lucy, for you will speak differently in a year's time. And I am to be bride's-man, and ride before you to the church; and all our relations and friends, and all Bucklaw's, are to ride in order; and I am to have a red laced coat, and a feathered hat, and a sword-belt with a double border

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of gold, and a dagger—I should like a sword better, but my father will not allow it. All the things are coming from Edinburgh tonight; and I will bring them and show them to you the instant they come.'

The boy's chatter was interrupted by his mother, a little alarmed at Lucy's delay. With one of her sweetest smiles, she took Lucy's arm and led her to the room where the rest awaited her.

These were, Sir William Ashton: Colonel Douglas Ashton, in full uniform: Bucklaw, dressed as a bridegroom: Craigengelt, freshly equipped from head to foot by his friend's gift, and wearing a great deal too much lace: and Mr. Bide-the-Bent; since in strict Presbyterian families, a minister was always present at times of special solemnity. Wine and food were on the table, where the papers lay ready to be signed.

But before either of these were touched, Mr. Bide-the-Bent, at a sign from Sir William Ashton, invited the company to join him in a short prayer, in which he asked God's blessing on the contract about to be made between the honourable parties then present. At such times, it was usual for a minister to speak of the parties personally; so Mr. Bide-the-Bent prayed that the wounded mind of one of them might be healed, in reward for her consent to her parents' will: and that as she had proved her goodness by honouring her father and mother, she might enjoy God's promised blessing—long life on earth, and happiness in heaven. He prayed also that the bridegroom might give up those follies which lead youth astray: that he might cease to take delight in unworthy company—mockers, rioters, and those who sit late at wine (here Bucklaw winked to Craigengelt) and forsake sinful society. He ended with

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a prayer for Sir William and Lady Ashton; having thus named all those present except Craigengelt, whom he probably thought to be beyond hope of grace.

The business of the day now went forward. Sir William signed the contract with a lawyer's solemnity and care: his son, with a soldier's ease; and Bucklaw, after signing as quickly as Craigengelt could turn the pages, ended by wiping his pen on the Captain's new lace.

It was now Lucy's turn to sign, and her watchful mother led her to the table. At first she began to write with a dry pen; and even when this was pointed out, seemed unable to dip it in the large silver inkstand which stood full before her. The papers still exist; and on each page, the signature of Lucy Ashton is only slightly uneven, showing the state of her mind as she wrote. But the last signature is unfinished, spoilt and blotted; for as her hand was writing it, the hasty tramp of a horse was heard at the gate, followed by a step outside the door, and a stern voice which overcame the servants' denials. The pen dropped from Lucy's fingers, as she exclaimed with a faint shriek—'He is come—he is come!'

XXXI

Hardly had Miss Ashton dropped the pen, when the door flew open, and the Master of Ravenswood entered.

Two servants, who had tried in vain to stop him outside, were seen standing motionless with surprise, which was at once shared by all. That of Colonel Ashton was mixed with anger, that of Bucklaw with

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pretended indifference; the rest, even Lady Ashton, shewed signs of fear, and Lucy seemed turned to stone by this sudden apparition—as it may well be called, for Ravenswood looked more like one returned from the dead, than a living man.

He stood firm in the middle of the room, opposite the table where Lucy sat; on whom, as if she had been alone, he gazed with a look of mixed grief and anger. His dark riding-cloak hung from one shoulder only, and the rest of his dress was disordered and travel-stained. He wore a sword and pistols. His broad hat, which he had not removed, gave a deeper gloom to his dark face which, wasted by sorrow and illness, was even more stern and savage than it had used to be. His wild hair escaping under his hat, and his stillness, made his head more like a marble bust than that of a man. He said not a single word, and for a while there was deep silence.

And then Lady Ashton, recovering her boldness, asked why he came thus unbidden. 'That is a question, madam,' said her son, 'which I have the best right to ask. And I must request the Master of Ravenswood to follow me and answer it.'

Bucklaw interposed, saying that no man on earth should precede him in challenging Ravenswood. But as Colonel Ashton insisted, Ravenswood waved his hand sternly.

'Be patient, gentlemen! If you are as weary of your lives as I, I will find time and place to meet you. At present, I have no time to dispute with triflers—'

Bucklaw and Colonel Ashton both sprang forward then, but Sir William rushed between them and

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the Master in fear, and charged them to keep the peace, in the name of the law.

'In the name of the law of God!' said Bide-the-Bent, coming forward too. 'In the name of Him who brought peace on earth, I command you to forbear violence!'

'Do you take me for a dog, sir,' cried Colonel Ashton, turning on him, 'to endure this insult in my father's house? He shall answer me, or I will stab him where he stands!'

'You shall not touch him here,' said Bucklaw. 'He once gave me my life, and shall have nothing but fair play.'

But Ravenswood, in a stern and steady voice, cried—'Silence! Let him who seeks danger, choose a proper time. My work here will soon be done···Is that your handwriting, madam?' he added more softly, showing Miss Ashton her last letter.

'Yes,' faltered Lucy, as though against her will.

'And is this also yours?' He held out the paper stating their engagement.

Lucy remained silent; terror and confusion so disturbing her mind, that she probably hardly understood his question. Sir William tried to speak, but Ravenswood interrupted him.

'I pray you all,' he said, 'not to mistake my purpose. If this young lady, of her own free will, wishes to end our contract, as her letter seems to say—I hold it of no further value. But I must hear the truth from her own mouth, or I will not leave. You may murder me by numbers; but I am armed and desperate, and will not die unavenged. I will hear her speak, alone, and without witnesses. So

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choose—!' And with that he drew his sword and a pistol, and held them ready.

All stood dismayed; but the clergyman was the first to speak. 'In the name of God,' he said, 'hear me! What this man asks, though violent, is not unjust. Let him hear from Miss Lucy's own lips that she has dutifully obeyed her parents, and repents of her contract with him. When he knows this, he will depart in peace and trouble us no more.'

'Never!' cried Lady Ashton, whose rage had now overcome her surprise. 'Never shall this man speak in private with my daughter, another's bride! I fear neither his violence nor his weapons, and I will remain!'

'In the young lady's state of health,' said Bide-the-Bent, 'the Master will not refuse this. I myself will also stay, in case my grey hairs may turn away wrath.'

'You are welcome to do so, sir' said Ravenswood, 'and Lady Ashton too, if she wishes. But let the rest go.'

'Ravenswood,' said Colonel Ashton, passing him. 'You shall soon answer for this—'

'Arrange it as you please,' Ravenswood replied. 'Leave me today, and tomorrow I shall have no dearer wish than to give both you and Bucklaw your answer.'

The two men then left the room. Sir William Ashton still delayed, however, and was beginning some further argument when the Master interrupted him. 'Tomorrow, sir, I will hear you. This day has its own sacred and necessary business.' And so Sir William went out too.

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Ravenswood laid aside his weapons, locked the door, and putting off his hat looked sorrowfully at Lucy Ashton.

'Do you know me, Miss Ashton?' he asked. 'I am still that Edgar Ravenswood who, for your love, gave up the vengeance which his injured honour required.'

'My daughter will not mistake you,' interrupted Lady Ashton. 'The venom of your words is enough to remind her that you are her father's mortal enemy.'

'Pray be patient, madam,' answered Ravenswood. 'My answer must come from herself. Once more, Miss Lucy Ashton, I am he to whom you gave the solemn engagement, which you now wish to end.'

Lucy's pale lips could only falter—'It was my mother!'

'She speaks truly,' said Lady Ashton. 'It was I who advised her so, with the authority of Scripture itself!' And turning to Bide-the-Bent, she began to bid him read a certain passage from the Bible, in which it is laid down, that if a daughter makes a secret vow, which her father disallows as soon as he hears of it, that vow shall not bind her. 'And was not this our case,' she asked triumphantly. 'Did we not disallow her vow, the instant it came to our ears?'

'And is this all?' said Ravenswood, looking at Lucy steadily. 'Are you willing to exchange your vow, your free will, and your love, for this wretched trickery of words?'

'Hear him!' cried Lady Ashton to the clergyman. 'Hear the blasphemer!'

'Hear what I gave up for you,' went on Ravenswood to Lucy, 'before you consent to what has been

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done in your name. The honour of an ancient family, the advice of my best friends, the voice of reason, prophecies,—none of these moved me. The very dead arose to warn me, and were despised. Are you ready to pierce my faithful heart, with the very weapon of love which I entrusted to you so rashly?'

'Master of Ravenswood,' said Lady Ashton, 'you have asked your questions, and see that my daughter is unfit to answer. But I will do so for her. You ask if Lucy Ashton, of her own free will, desires to break your contract. You have her letter, requesting that; and for more evidence, here is the contract which she has signed today with Mr. Hayston of Bucklaw.'

Ravenswood stared at the contract as if turned to stone. 'And did Miss Ashton sign this without force or fraud?' he asked the clergyman.

'I swear it.'

Then at last, Ravenswood gave way. 'Then, madam' he said to Lucy, 'I return the evidence of your first engagement. May you be more faithful to that which you have just formed! I will trouble you to return to me the tokens of mine.' And he laid before her the signed paper, and the broken piece of gold.

Lucy returned her lover's scornful glance with a gaze, in which there seemed to be no understanding. Yet she partly knew his meaning, for she raised her hands to loose a ribbon which she wore round her neck. But her strength failed, and Lady Ashton herself cut the ribbon and took off the piece of gold which Lucy had worn hidden in her bosom. With a

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proud curtsey, she gave both gold and writing to Ravenswood.

'And she could wear it thus,' he said to himself, 'even when—' Then he broke off, and striding to the fire, threw in the gold and paper and stamped them into the coals with the heel of his boot. 'I will stay no longer,' he said. 'Your evil wishes, Lady Ashton, I will only return by hoping that you will plot no more against your daughter's honour and happiness. And to you, madam,' he added to Lucy, 'I say no more, except to pray that you may not become a world's wonder for this cruel and treacherous act!' and with that, he turned on his heel and left them.

As he went down the stairs, a servant gave him a letter from Colonel Ashton, asking where he could meet him four or five days from hence, when his sister's wedding was over. 'Tell Colonel Ashton,' Ravenswood said calmly, 'I shall be found at Wolf's Grag whenever he likes.'

On the outer steps he was met by Craigengelt, who began with insolence to deliver another message from his master Bucklaw. But Ravenswood's patience was gone. Throwing Craigengelt from him, he hurled him down the steps with such force, that he lay senseless at the foot of them. He then mounted his horse, rode slowly past Bucklaw and Colonel Ashton, and raised his hat to each, looking them full in the face. They returned his salute in stern silence; and the Master, after riding slowly on till he reached the head of the avenue, gave one fixed glance back towards the castle, and then set spurs to his steed and galloped madly away.

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XXXII

After the dreadful scene at the castle, Lucy was carried to her own room, where she remained for some time in a state of stupor. Yet as the day went on she seemed to recover, and even showed a kind of unnatural gaiety, by turns with fits of gloom and deep silence. Lady Ashton, much alarmed, called in her doctors. But as the girl's pulse was steady, they could only say that the disorder was in her mind, and might be cured by light exercise and amusement. She never said a word of what had happened; perhaps she was not even conscious of it, for she was often seen to raise her hand to her neck, as if in search o the ribbon, and to mutter—'It was the link that bound me to life.'

Yet even so, Lady Ashton was too deeply pledged to the marriage to delay it. She knew that if Bucklaw saw any reluctance in Lucy, he would break off the match. She therefore resolved that it should take place on the appointed day, trusting that a change of life would cure her daughter more quickly than the doctors. Sir William's hopes and fears for his own future led him to agree, though perhaps he could not in any case have resisted. And the young men protested that if the wedding were put off for a single hour, it would be said that they were afraid of Ravenswood.

On the eve of the bridal day, Lucy had one of her gay fits, and watched with girlish interest the various preparations which were being made by the family. The morning dawned brightly, and the guests gathered from far and near, all gallantly mounted and dressed. They first feasted splendidly; then, as they

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called for their horses, the bride was led out between Henry and her mother. There was a light in her eyes, and a colour in her cheeks, which had not been there for many a day; and which, with her great beauty and the splendour of her dress, caused her to be greeted with a murmur of applause from all.

Henry, as bride's-man, mounted on a horse with his sister behind him; he wore an enormous sword belonging to Colonel Ashton; and when his father asked him why he did not use the short dagger from Ebinburgh, the boy replied that it could not be found. At the time, he was too full of his own appearance to heed anything else; but he remembered later, to his dying day, that when his sister's hand touched his it was as wet and cold, as the marble of a tomb.

After the wedding-service, money and food were given out to the poor of the district, among whom sat Dame Gourlay with the two other old women, who had helped her to lay out Alice. 'Their gifts,' she muttered sourly, 'are given for no love of us, but to serve their own vanity!'

'But did you ever see a grander bridal?' another asked.

'I think not,' answered the hag. 'But I think soon to see as fine a burial.'

'That would please me as well,' exclaimed her friend. 'God send us a green Christmas and a full churchyard!'

'But,' put in the third, 'since you are the oldest and wisest of us three, I would like to know which of these revellers will be first struck down?'

'Do you see that maiden all in gold and jewels, that they are lifting up on the white horse—'

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'But that's the bride herself! Alas, so young, so fine and so pretty—is her time so short?'

'I tell you,' said the witch, 'her shroud is up as high as her throat already! Her sand has but a few grains to run out, and they have been well shaken—' And then she pointed to Lady Ashton, riding by the bride. 'Do you see her? There is more utter devilry in that woman, for all her splendour, than in all the witches that ever flew by moonlight!'

But now the whole gallant company were riding back to the castle, with loud cries of 'Ashton!,' 'Bucklaw!,' and with firing of pistols and guns. In those days the weddings of great families were celebrated with more public display than now, and the guests at Ravenswood were welcomed to a very great banquet. The gentlemen drank deeply, as the custom was, while the ladies awaited their appearance at the ball which always ended such festivals. At last the music sounded, and they streamed out on the floor. But as Lady Ashton, taking the place of Lucy on account of her weakness, was about to open the ball, she saw suddenly a strange alteration on the walls of the room. 'Who has dared to change the pictures?' she cried.

All looked up, and saw to their surprise that the portrait of Sir William's father had been replaced by that of old Sir Malise Ravenswood, who seemed to frown wrath and vengeance on the guests below. Angrily, the gentlemen began to ask the reason of such an insult; but Lady Ashton, recovering herself, passed it off as the act of a mad servant who was allowed to live in the castle, and ordered the portrait to be removed. As the dance ended, she was not

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surprised to find that Lucy had left the room, and followed to make sure that the strange incident had not too greatly upset her. But in due time she returned, content, and whispered to Bucklaw, who at once left the ball. The musicians now played their loudest, and the guests were dancing more joyously than ever, when a cry was heard so shrill and piercing as to make them all pause. The yell was heard again; and then Colonel Ashton snatched a torch and, followed by Sir William and Lady Ashton and one or two near relations, rushed to the bridechamber.

There he knocked and called, but had no answer but groans. So waiting no longer, he burst open the door. On the threshold lay the body of the bridegroom, and the floor was covered with blood. A cry of horror was raised; and the whole company began to rush towards the room, when Colonel Ashton with drawn sword bade all but a clergyman and a doctor to stand back. At the same time he whispered to his mother 'Search for her! She has murdered him!'

Bucklaw, still breathing, was borne to another room. But the searchers hunted through the bridal chamber for Lucy in vain. They began to think she must have thrown herself from the window, when one of them saw something white in the corner of the great old-fashioned chimney. Here they found the wretched girl crouching—her clothes torn and dabbled with blood, her eyes glazed, and her face twisted in madness. When she saw herself discovered, she gibbered and pointed at them with her bloody fingers, a raving maniac.

Her serving-women were now called, and after some trouble the unhappy bride was overpowered.

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As they carried her out, she looked down at the threshold and uttered her only words which could be understood—'So, you have taken up your pretty bridegroom?'

XXXIII

Bucklaw, the doctor soon found, was not dead. But his wounds were so dangerous that he could not be removed. In view of what had happened, his friends insisted that a few of them should remain, well armed, to guard him; the rest left the castle at once. The doctor then turned his attention to Miss Ashton, whom he found to be in a very dangerous state. All night she raved in madness, and in the morning became insensible. And although next night she awoke to some sort of calmness, and let herself be dressed, yet she no sooner put her hand to her neck than she seemed to regain memories, which neither her mind nor her body could bear. Fit followed fit, until they ended in death, without her being able to utter a word to explain the fatal scene.

Next day the judge of the district came, and performed as gently as he could the painful duty of enquiring into the terrible facts. Nothing further could be learned, however, than that the bride, in a sudden fit of madness, had stabbed the bridegroom at the door of the room. The fatal weapon was found there, smeared with blood. It was the dagger which Henry should have worn on the wedding day, and which his unhappy sister had probably managed to hide the night before, when the preparations for her wedding were shown to her.

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Bucklaw's friends expected that on recovery he would be able to tell them more. For some time he professed to be too weak to explain; but later, he called his friends to him, both men and women, and after thanking them for their sympathy, said—'I wish you all to know that I have neither any story to tell, nor any injury to avenge. In future, if any lady shall question me about that unhappy night, I shall be silent, and never speak to her again. If any man, I shall regard his incivility as equal to a challenge to a duel.'

After this, no questions could be asked; and it was soon seen that Bucklaw had returned to health as a sadder and wiser man. He dismissed Craigengelt, though he provided for him lest he should suffer from want; and then went abroad, nor ever again returned to Scotland.

Lucy Ashton was buried, in the dawn of an autumn day, with such little ceremony as could not be avoided. A very few relations followed her to the same church, where she had so lately come as a bride with as little free will, perhaps, as her lifeless body now owned. And in a coffin bearing neither name nor date, were returned to dust the remains of what was once lovely and innocent, though driven to madness by long persecution. While the mourners were busy in the vault, the three village hags, despite the early hour, sat on a tombstone in the churchyard, talking.

'Did I not say,' said Dame Gourlay, 'that the fine bridal would be followed by as fine a funeral?'

'There is little finery at it,' another said. 'Neither meat nor drink,—it was not worth our while to come so far for so little.'

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'Why,' replied the witch, 'what food could be so sweet as this hour's vengeance? There they are, that were capering on their horses four days ago, now going as sadly as ourselves. And Miss Lucy Ashton, that hated an honest woman to come near her—a toad may sit on her coffin today, and croak at her. Lady Ashton has hell-fire burning in her breast. And Sir William, with his laws against witches,—how likes he the witcheries of his own house?'

'Is it true, then,' muttered the third, 'that the bride was dragged up the chimney by evil spirits, and the bridegroom's face twisted round behind him?'

'You need not care who did it, nor how it was done,' said Ailsie Gourlay. 'It was done well, as the lords and ladies know this day!'

'And is it true that the picture of old Sir Malise Ravenswood came down to the dance?'

'It came—and I know well how it came—' said Ailsie 'to warn them that pride would have a fall. But there's queer play in the vault there, even now. You saw twelve cloaked mourners going down the steps? But you did not see a thirteenth there, that they know nothing about! If old prophecies say true, there's one of that company that will not be long in this world. But come away! For whatever evil befalls, we shall get the blame of it!'

And thus, croaking like ravens before a plague, the old hags withdrew.

Indeed, when the service ended, the mourners found that there was among them one more than had been invited. They began to whisper, pointing at a muffled figure who leaned against a pillar of the vault. Then Colonel Ashton said—'I know who this person

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is. Leave me to deal with him!' With which words he left the rest, and taking the unknown mourner by the cloak, said in a low tone, 'Follow me.'

The stranger, as if starting from a trance, obeyed, and the two retired to the farthest corner of the churchyard. 'I cannot doubt,' began the Colonel, 'that I speak to the Master of Ravenswood—to my sister's murderer?'

'You have named me but too truly.'

'If you repent what you have done, may God forgive you, for I shall not. Here is the length of my sword, and a note of the time and place of meeting.'

For awhile the Master paused. 'Do not urge a desperate wretch,' he said at last. 'Enjoy your life while you can, and let me seek my death from another.'

'That you never shall,' said Douglas Ashton. 'You shall die by my hand, or complete the ruin of my family by killing me; if not, I will load the name of Ravenswood with every indignity and dishonour.'

'That shall never happen,' said Ravenswood fiercely. 'If I am the last to bear the name, I must see that it perishes without infamy. I accept your challenge.'

'On the moors above the beach, to the east of Wolf's Hope—with swords, alone—at sunrise.'

'Enough,' said the Master. 'I will not fail you.'

XXXIV

Late that night, the Master surprised old Caleb Balderstone by returning to Wolf's Crag. The old man was full of anxiety; for he had heard what had passed at the castle, and feared the effect of it upon his master. The conduct of Ravenswood added to his

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fears. At first the Master refused food and drink; then he called for wine and, unlike himself, drank a good deal. Old Caleb led the way to the bedchamber, but the Master stopped at the door. 'Not here,' he said sternly. 'Show me the room in which my father died; the room in which *she* slept when she was at the castle.'

This room was unready and bare, but the Master insisted on having it. That night old Caleb prayed more than he slept; from time to time he crept along to his master's door, through which he could hear the heavy step of Ravenswood, and sometimes a groan.

Dawn came at last, and calm weather; but an east wind had blown in the night, and the rising tide was coming nearer than usual to the foot of the crags on which the castle stood. Caleb peeped through a crack in Ravenswood's door, and saw his master busy measuring two or three swords. As he chose one, Caleb heard him mutter—'It is shorter—let him have this advantage, as he has every other.'

Caleb now knew too well what his master meant to do, and how vain was his chance of stopping him. Yet he followed Ravenswood, when presently he went down to the courtyard and began to saddle his horse; and from the Master's disordered dress and ghastly look, he knew that he had taken no rest. Ravenswood was about to mount, when the old man flung himself at his feet and clasped his knees. 'Oh, sir' he cried, 'kill me if you will, but do not go upon this dreadful errand! Tomorrow the Marquis comes, and all will be well!'

'Well?' echoed Ravenswood. 'Nothing will ever be well with me in this life, and the hour is happiest

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that shall soonest end it.' So saying, he tore himself away and rode through the gate; pausing only to turn back to Caleb with a ghastly smile, and to throw him a heavy purse of gold. 'Caleb,' he cried, 'I leave my affairs in your hands!' And with that he rode away.

The gold lay untouched; for when Caleb saw which way his master went, he ran up to the battlements whence he could see along the shore almost as far as the village of Wolf's Hope. The Master was riding thither furiously; and at once Caleb recalled the prophecy, that the Lord of Ravenswood should perish in the Kelpie's Flow, or quicksand, which lay halfway between the tower, and the moors near Wolf's Hope. He saw him reach the fatal spot. But he never saw him pass farther.

Colonel Ashton, frantic for revenge, was already on the moors, watching impatiently for his foe to appear. And now the sun was up, and he could see the horseman who rode towards him with an eagerness equal to his own. Suddenly the figure vanished, as if it had melted into the air. He rubbed his eyes, as though he had seen a ghost, and then hastened to the spot, near which Balderstone met him. No trace of horse nor rider could be seen; they could only conclude that the late winds and high tides had greatly widened the quicksand, and that the unfortunate horseman in his haste had not taken care to keep to the firm sands at the foot of the rocks, but had gone by a shorter and more dangerous way. Only one trace of his fate appeared. A large black feather had come loose from his hat, which the rising tide washed to Caleb's feet. The old man took it up, dried it, and placed it in his bosom.

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The villagers were summoned, and came some on shore, some in boats, but their search was vain. The quicksand retained its prey.

Our tale draws to an end. The Marquis of A— alarmed at the frightful reports which he had heard, arrived next day; and after again vainly searching for the body, returned to forget what had happened amid the bustle of state affairs.

Not so Caleb Balderstone. So far as money was concerned, he was left better off than he had ever been before. But his whole life was bound up in the family which was now extinct. He lost heart, forsook his work and haunts, and seemed only to find pleasure in moping about the rooms which the Master had last occupied. Neither food nor sleep refreshed him; and with a fidelity sometimes shown by dogs, but seldom by human beings, he pined and died within a year of the disaster.

The family of Ashton did not long survive that of Ravenswood. Sir William outlived the Colonel, who was slain in a duel in Flanders; and Henry, who succeeded him, died unmarried. Lady Ashton lived to the verge of old age, the only survivor of all those unhappy persons, whose misfortunes were due to her hard heart. That she may have repented inwardly, we dare not deny; but to those around her she showed no sign of doing so. Outwardly, she bore the same bold, proud, hard character which she had always displayed. A splendid marble monument records her name, titles and virtues, while her victims remain unmarked by tomb or epitaph.

THE END.

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